**THE DRESSER.**

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| 1   An old man bending, I come, among new faces, |

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| Years looking backward, resuming, in answer to chil-           dren, |

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| *Come tell us old man,* as from young men and maidens           that love me; |

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| Years hence of these scenes, of these furious passions,           these chances, |

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| Of unsurpass'd heroes, (was one side so brave? the           other was equally brave;) |

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| Now be witness again—paint the mightiest armies of           earth; |

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| Of those armies so rapid, so wondrous, what saw you to           tell us? |

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| What stays with you latest and deepest? of curious           panics, |

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| Of hard-fought engagements, or sieges tremendous,           what deepest remains? |

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| 2   O maidens and young men I love, and that love me, |

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| What you ask of my days, those the strangest and sud-           den your talking recals; |

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| Soldier alert I arrive, after a long march, cover'd with           sweat and dust; |

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| In the nick of time I come, plunge in the fight, loudly           shout in the rush of successful charge; |

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| Enter the captur'd works . . . . yet lo! like a swift-           running river, they fade; |

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| Pass and are gone, they fade—I dwell not on soldiers'           perils or soldiers' joys; |

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| (Both I remember well—many the hardships, few the           joys, yet I was content.) | |
| 3   But in silence, in dream's projections, |

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| While the world of gain and appearance and mirth goes           on, |

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| So soon what is over forgotten, and waves wash the           imprints off the sand, |

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| In nature's reverie sad, with hinged knees returning, I           enter the doors—(while for you up there, |

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| Whoever you are, follow me without noise, and be of           strong heart.) |

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| 4   Bearing the bandages, water and sponge, |

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| Straight and swift to my wounded I go, |

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| Where they lie on the ground, after the battle brought           in; |

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| Where their priceless blood reddens the grass, the           ground; |

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| Or to the rows of the hospital tent, or under the roof'd           hospital; |

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| To the long rows of cots, up and down, each side, I           return; |

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| To each and all, one after another, I draw near—not           one do I miss; |

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| An attendant follows, holding a tray—he carries a           refuse pail, |

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| Soon to be fill'd with clotted rags and blood, emptied,           and fill'd again. |

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| 5   I onward go, I stop, |

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| With hinged knees and steady hand, to dress wounds; |

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| I am firm with each—the pangs are sharp, yet unavoid-           able; |

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| One turns to me his appealing eyes—(poor boy! I           never knew you, |

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| Yet I think I could not refuse this moment to die for           you, if that would save you.) |

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| 6   On, on I go—(open, doors of time! open, hospital           doors!) |
| The crush'd head I dress, (poor crazed hand, tear not the           bandage away;) | |

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| The neck of the cavalry-man, with the bullet through           and through, I examine; |

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| Hard the breathing rattles, quite glazed already the eye,           yet life struggles hard; |

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| (Come, sweet death! be persuaded, O beautiful death! |

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| In mercy come quickly.) |

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| 7   From the stump of the arm, the amputated hand, |

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| I undo the clotted lint, remove the slough, wash off the           matter and blood; |

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| Back on his pillow the soldier bends, with curv'd neck,           and side-falling head; |

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| His eyes are closed, his face is pale, he dares not look on           the bloody stump, |

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| And has not yet looked on it. |

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| 8   I dress a wound in the side, deep, deep; |

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| But a day or two more—for see, the frame all wasted           and sinking, |

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| And the yellow-blue countenance see. |

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| 9   I dress the perforated shoulder, the foot with the bul-           let wound, |

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| Cleanse the one with a gnawing and putrid gangrene, so           sickening, so offensive, |

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| While the attendant stands behind aside me, holding           the tray and pail. |

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| 10   I am faithful, I do not give out; |

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| The fractur'd thigh, the knee, the wound in the abdo-           men, |

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| These and more I dress with impassive hand—(yet           deep in my breast a fire, a burning flame.) |

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| 11   Thus in silence, in dream's projections, |

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| Returning, resuming, I thread my way through the hospitals; | |
| The hurt and the wounded I pacify with soothing hand, |

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| I sit by the restless all the dark night—some are so           young; |

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| Some suffer so much—I recall the experience sweet           and sad; |

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| (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have           cross'd and rested, |

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| Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.) |