

There Was a Child Went Forth

Walt Whitman

THERE was a child went forth every day;
And the first object he look'd upon, that object he became;
And that object became part of him for the day, or a certain part of the day, or for
many years, or stretching cycles of years.

The early lilacs became part of this child,
And grass, and white and red morning-glories, and white and red clover, and the
song of the phoebe-bird,

5

And the Third-month lambs, and the sow's pink-faint litter, and the mare's foal, and
the cow's calf,
And the noisy brood of the barn-yard, or by the mire of the pond-side,
And the fish suspending themselves so curiously below there—and the beautiful
curious liquid,
And the water-plants with their graceful flat heads—all became part of him.

The field-sprouts of Fourth-month and Fifth-month became part of him;

1

0

Winter-grain sprouts, and those of the light-yellow corn, and the esculent roots of
the garden,
And the apple-trees cover'd with blossoms, and the fruit afterward, and wood-
berries, and the commonest weeds by the road;
And the old drunkard staggering home from the out-house of the tavern, whence
he had lately risen,
And the school-mistress that pass'd on her way to the school,
And the friendly boys that pass'd—and the quarrelsome boys,

1

5

And the tidy and fresh-cheek'd girls—and the barefoot negro boy and girl,
And all the changes of city and country, wherever he went.

His own parents,
He that had father'd him, and she that had conceiv'd him in her womb, and birth'd
him,
They gave this child more of themselves than that;

2

0

They gave him afterward every day—they became part of him.

The mother at home, quietly placing the dishes on the supper-table;
The mother with mild words—clean her cap and gown, a wholesome odor falling off
her person and clothes as she walks by;

The father, strong, self-sufficient, manly, mean, anger'd, unjust;
The blow, the quick loud word, the tight bargain, the crafty lure,

2

5

The family usages, the language, the company, the furniture—the yearning and
swelling heart,
Affection that will not be gainsay'd—the sense of what is real—the thought if, after
all, it should prove unreal,
The doubts of day-time and the doubts of night-time—the curious whether and
how,
Whether that which appears so is so, or is it all flashes and specks?
Men and women crowding fast in the streets—if they are not flashes and specks,
what are they?

3

0

The streets themselves, and the façades of houses, and goods in the windows,
Vehicles, teams, the heavy-plank'd wharves—the huge crossing at the ferries,
The village on the highland, seen from afar at sunset—the river between,
Shadows, aureola and mist, the light falling on roofs and gables of white or brown,
three miles off,
The schooner near by, sleepily dropping down the tide—the little boat slack-tow'd
astern,

3

5

The hurrying tumbling waves, quick-broken crests, slapping,
The strata of color'd clouds, the long bar of maroon-tint, away solitary by itself—the
spread of purity it lies motionless in,
The horizon's edge, the flying sea-crow, the fragrance of salt marsh and shore
mud;
These became part of that child who went forth every day, and who now goes, and
will always go forth every day.