

De Morte

[In Honour of Saladin]

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Dear friend, whoever you are, here, take this kiss,
I give it especially to you—Do not forget me,
I feel like one who has done his work—I progress on,
The unknown sphere, more real than I dreamed,
 more direct, darts awakening rays about me—
 So long!

Remember my words—I love you—I depart from materials,
I am as one disembodied, triumphant, dead.
 —*Walt Whitman*

I.

Upon the ridge of the world where night and day
 Part, and the eastward and the westward lie
 On either side the watcher, and the sky
Turns now to gold and red, and now to grey,—
There doth he stand, and gazing far away
 With shaded eyes watches the vultures fly
 Around the hills where the men care cast to die
Beneath the moon-beams and the sun's hot ray.

And dawn and dark wheel circling round his head,
 To mingle in an ever-widening sphere,
And from its centre is a fierce heat shed,
 But as he stands there lights upon his ear
 A Pæan of the love that casts out fear,—
The tribute of the ever-living dead.

II.

Lo! He is parted from the cold dull tomb,
 Our pure-eyed priest of Man, whose song arose
 From out the ash of human joys and woes,
Who learned of light within the blackest gloom;

And he is passed from our dull fret and fume
 Unto the sphere where speechful silence glows;
 His manifold mantle shall descend on those
Who worshipped with him at the feet of Doom.

He sees the whirling world as in a dream;
 He hears, but hears as one apart, afar,
As through his being flows an endless stream
 Of song and light from star to furthest star,
And in his eyes unquenchable doth gleam
 Unmeasured love for all that strive and are.

III.

O blest Nirvana! Let his soul forget,
 Forget the fears that stung him on his way;
 Now let him stand uncovered to the day
That dawns upon the night-tide of his fret;
For on his brow a crown of thorns was set,
 And in his hand a broken staff there lay,
 And all his body was in disarray,—
I see him in his anguish even yet.

The shell is burst; the harp's wise note is fled;
 The spherèd heavens around him lie, and see!
 There stands the giver of melody
New-risen from the clay; the gold and red
Within the dawn his heart's desire have fed,
 And he hath found Nirvana, and is free.

IV. OF FAME.

Blue-lighted space, and every breath a flame;
 Green-crested seas wide-flecked with glittering foam;
 Deep woods, of silver echoings the home,
Echoes of many a star-wreathéd name;—
And lo! a gold-eyed god enraptured came,
 With tawny yellow hair that rimmed the dome
 Of his fair brows that bore a jewelled comb
Beset with stars: the golden god was Fame.

And as he passed me by, I rose and gazed
 Far in the shining wake of him; he turned;
A blinding moment my dull eyes I raised,
 And through me throbbèd his gaze that stabbed and burned,

But in his eyes came mirrored to me, dazed,
The name of him I mourned, for whom I yearned.

A god of shadows, not of mortal men,
He shuns the earth, or enters but to flee,—
Fame stays but little with humanity
That strives to draw him downward with a pen.
But his eyes healed my bleeding heart again
I might not follow, but he raised for me
A clarion-note that sounded o'er the sea,
And echoed far away, beyond my ken.

And on heaven's brow there flashed a sign
That sudden lit the god's swift-darkening way,
And herald voices filled the air divine
With bursts of music that proclaimed the day;
The fiery flash the far horizon-line
Illumed, and merged in the sun's stronger ray.

V.

Cast back the veil before the empty shrine;
The altar fire is dead; the sun is set;
Go! I make a living altar to Regret,
And she shall bless the sacrificial wine.
The sable queen response doth lend divine,
But in her answer love and fear are met,
And from the impact there resoundeth yet
A note more tender-true, more subtly fine.

For Life and Death lie mingled; never more
Shall Death's strong arm untwine from Life's fair breast;
And Death's fierce heart is sweetness at the core,
And Life makes answer still to Death's behest:
Death's hand to Life doth beckon, Life's to Death,
Through the twain doors of ether and of breath.

VI.

Upon his body lies a flowery lyre,
It lies upon his breast with broken strings,—
The chords were sundered by his soaring wings
As he fled through,—a flame of heaven's fire.
Ah! he is the land of Heart's Desire,
And Poesy her radiant mantle flings

About him, as a triumph-song outrings,
And all the winds of heaven him inspire.

The portals lie before him; weep not now,
Lest he return, nor find his heaven soon;
But see, Oblivion o'er his radiant brow
Hath cast a light more soft than did the moon,
And all the grace that did his heart endow
Irradiates the life behind him strewn.