

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1891-92 edition.

VIGIL STRANGE I KEPT ON THE FIELD ONE NIGHT.

VIGIL strange I kept on the field one night;
When you my son and my comrade dropt at my side that day,
One look I but gave which your dear eyes return'd with a look I
 shall never forget,
One touch of your hand to mine O boy, reach'd up as you lay on
 the ground,
Then onward I sped in the battle, the even-contested battle,
Till late in the night reliev'd to the place at last again I made my
 way,
Found you in death so cold dear comrade, found your body son
 of responding kisses, (never again on earth responding,)
Bared your face in the starlight, curious the scene, cool blew the
 moderate night-wind,
Long there and then in vigil I stood, dimly around me the battle-
 field spreading,
Vigil wondrous and vigil sweet there in the fragrant silent night,
But not a tear fell, not even a long-drawn sigh, long, long I gazed,
Then on the earth partially reclining sat by your side leaning my
 chin in my hands,
Passing sweet hours, immortal and mystic hours with you dearest
 comrade—not a tear, not a word,
Vigil of silence, love and death, vigil for you my son and my
 soldier,
As onward silently stars aloft, eastward new ones upward stole,
Vigil final for you brave boy, (I could not save you, swift was your
 death,
I faithfully loved you and cared for you living, I think we shall
 surely meet again,)
Till at latest lingering of the night, indeed just as the dawn
 appear'd,
My comrade I wrapt in his blanket, envelop'd well his form,
Folded the blanket well, tucking it carefully over head and care-
 fully under feet,
And there and then and bathed by the rising sun, my son in his
 grave, in his rude-dug grave I deposited,
Ending my vigil strange with that, vigil of night and battle-field
 dim,
Vigil for boy of responding kisses, (never again on earth
 responding,)

Vigil for comrade swiftly slain, vigil I never forget, how as day
brighten'd,
I rose from the chill ground and folded my soldier well in his
blanket,
And buried him where he fell.

Walt Whitman Archive

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