

Twenty-eight young men bathe by the shore,²
 Twenty-eight young men and all so friendly; 200
 Twenty-eight years of womanly life and all so lonesome.

She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank,
 She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window.

Which of the young men does she like the best?
 Ah the homeliest of them is beautiful to her. 205

Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
 You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth
 bather,
 The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them.

The beards of the young men glisten'd with wet, it ran from
 their long hair, 210
 Little streams pass'd all over their bodies.

An unseen hand also pass'd over their bodies,
 It descended tremblingly from their temples and ribs.

The young men float on their backs, their white bellies bulge
 to the sun, they do not ask who seizes fast to them,
 They do not know who puffs and declines with pendant and
 bending arch, 215
 They do not think whom they souse with spray.

2. This parable—WW's first—is audacious for its time, and extraordinarily delicate in its sensitive recognition of loneliness and desire. For a sampling of critical response to this section, see Miller, ed. *Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself": A Mosaic of Interpretations*, 74–77. See also Michael Moon's commentary on this passage, reprinted in this volume, p. 863.