

A SIGHT IN CAMP IN THE DAYBREAK GRAY AND DIM

Walt Whitman

A sight in camp in the daybreak gray and dim,
As from my tent I emerge so early sleepless,
As slow I walk in the cool fresh air the path near by the hospital tent,
Three forms I see on stretchers lying, brought out there untended lying,
Over each the blanket spread, ample brownish woollen blanket,
Gray and heavy blanket, folding, covering all.
Curious I halt and silent stand,
Then with light fingers I from the face of the nearest the first just lift the blanket;
Who are you elderly man so gaunt and grim, with well-gray'd hair, and flesh all sunken about the eyes?
Who are you my dear comrade?
Then to the second I step—and who are you my child and darling?
Who are you sweet boy with cheeks yet blooming?
Then to the third—a face nor child nor old, very calm, as of beautiful yellow-white ivory;
Young man I think I know you—I think this face is the face of the Christ himself,
Dead and divine and brother of all, and here again he lies.

Works Cited:

http://www.gutenberg.org/files/27494/27494-h/27494-h.htm#Page_14

Questions:

1. According to the first stanza, what does the speaker see at daybreak? What item does the speaker describe in lines 5-6? Why do you suppose the speaker might have focused on this item?
2. Describe the first two soldiers. What do the speaker's questions imply about his feelings toward the soldiers?
3. To whom does the speaker compare the third soldier? What does this tell you about the speaker's emotional reaction to what he sees?
4. What does each soldier add to our understanding of the poem's message?