

A Selection of Poems by Emily Dickinson

All numbering references *The Poems of Emily Dickinson Edited by R. W. Franklin* (Harvard University Press, 1999).

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Safe in their Alabaster Chambers -
Untouched by Morning -
and untouched by noon -
Sleep the meek members of the Resurrection,
Rafter of Satin and Roof of Stone -

Grand go the Years,
In the Crescent above them -
Worlds scoop their Arcs -
and Firmaments - row -
Diadems - drop -
And Doges surrender -
Soundless as Dots,
On a Disk of Snow.

Title divine - is mine!
The Wife - without the Sign!
Acute Degree - conferred on me -
Empress of Calvary!
Royal - all but the Crown!
Betrothed - without the swoon
God sends us Women -
When you - hold - Garnet to Garnet -
Gold - to Gold -
Born - Bridalled - Shrouded -
In a Day -
“My Husband” - women say -
Stroking the Melody -
Is *this* - the way?

202

“Faith” is a fine invention
For Gentlemen who *see!*
But Microscopes are prudent
In an Emergency!

I'm Nobody! Who are you?
Are you - Nobody - too?
Then there's a pair of us!
Don't tell! they'd advertise - you know!

How dreary - to be - Somebody!
How public - like a Frog -
To tell one's name - the livelong June -
To an admiring Bog!

Wild nights - Wild nights!
Were I with thee
Wild nights should be
Our luxury!

Futile - the winds -
To a Heart in port -
Done with the Compass -
Done with the Chart!

Rowing in Eden -
Ah - the Sea!
Might I but moor - tonight -
In thee!

I can wade Grief -
Whole Pools of it -
I'm used to that -
But the least push of Joy
Breaks up my feet -
And I tip - drunken -
Let no Pebble - smile -
'Twas the New Liquor -
That was all!

Power is only Pain -
Stranded, thro' Discipline,
Till Weights - will hang -
Give Balm - to Giants -
And they'll wilt, like Men -
Give Himmaleh -
They'll Carry - Him!

314

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I've heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me.

There's a certain Slant of light,
Winter Afternoons -
That oppresses, like the Heft
Of Cathedral Tunes -

Heavenly Hurt, it gives us -
We can find no scar,
But internal difference -
Where the Meanings, are -

None may teach it - Any -
'Tis the seal Despair -
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the Air -

When it comes, the Landscape listens -
Shadows - hold their breath -
When it goes, 'tis like the Distance
On the look of Death -

Before I got my eye put out -
I liked as well to see
As other creatures, that have eyes -
And know no other way -

But were it told to me, Today,
That I might have the Sky
For mine, I tell you that my Heart
Would split, for size of me -

The Meadows - mine -
The Mountains - mine -
All Forests - Stintless stars -
As much of noon, as I could take -
Between my finite eyes -

The Motions of the Dipping Birds -
The Morning's Amber Road -
For mine - to look at when I liked,
The news would strike me dead -

So safer - guess - with just my soul
Upon the window pane
Where other creatures put their eyes -
Incautious - of the Sun -

339

I like a look of Agony,
Because I know it's true-
Men do not sham Convulsion,
Nor simulate, a Throe-

The Eyes glaze once-and that is Death-
Impossible to feign
The Beads upon the Forehead
By homely Anguish strung.

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

And when they all were seated,
A Service, like a Drum -
Kept beating - beating - till I thought
My mind was going numb -

And then I heard them lift a Box
And creak across my Soul
With those same Boots of Lead, again,
Then Space - began to toll,

As all the Heavens were a Bell,
And Being, but an Ear,
And I, and Silence, some strange Race,
Wrecked, solitary, here -

And then a Plank in Reason, broke,
And I dropped down, and down -
And hit a World, at every plunge,
And Finished knowing - then -

A Bird, came down the Walk -
He did not know I saw -
He bit an Angle Worm in halves
And ate the fellow, raw,

And then, he drank a Dew
From a convenient Grass -
And then hopped sidewise to the Wall
To let a Beetle pass -

He glanced with rapid eyes,
That hurried all abroad -
They looked like frightened Beads, I thought,
He stirred his Velvet Head. -

Like one in danger, Cautious,
I offered him a Crumb,
And he unrolled his feathers,
And rowed him softer Home -

Than Oars divide the Ocean,
Too silver for a seam,
Or Butterflies, off Banks of Noon,
Leap, plashless as they swim.

After great pain, a formal feeling comes -
The Nerves sit ceremonious, like Tombs -
The stiff Heart questions 'was it He, that bore,'
And 'Yesterday, or Centuries before'?

The Feet, mechanical, go round -
A Wooden way
Of Ground, or Air, or Ought -
Regardless grown,
A Quartz contentment, like a stone -

This is the Hour of Lead -
Remembered, if outlived,
As Freezing persons, recollect the Snow -
First - Chill - then Stupor - then the letting go -

479

Because I could not stop for Death -
He kindly stopped for me -
The Carriage held but just Ourselves -
And Immortality.

We slowly drove - He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility -

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess - in the Ring -
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain -
We passed the Setting Sun -

Or rather - He passed Us -
The Dews drew quivering and Chill -
For only Gossamer, my Gown -
My Tippet - only Tulle -

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground -
The Roof was scarcely visible -
The Cornice - in the Ground -

Since then - 'tis Centuries - and yet

Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses' Heads
Were toward Eternity -

588

The Heart asks Pleasure - first -
And then - Excuse from Pain -
And then - those little Anodynes
That deaden suffering -

And then - to go to sleep -
And then - if it should be
The will of its Inquisitor
The liberty to die -

591

I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -
The Stillness in the Room
Was like the Stillness in the Air -
Between the Heaves of Storm -

The Eyes around - had wrung them dry -
And Breaths were gathering firm
For that last Onset - when the King
Be witnessed - in the Room -

I willed my Keepsakes - Signed away
What portion of me be
Assignable - and then it was
There interposed a Fly -

With Blue - uncertain - stumbling Buzz -
Between the light - and me -
And then the Windows failed - and then
I could not see to see -

598

The Brain - is wider than the Sky -
For - put them side by side -
The one the other will contain
With ease - and You - beside -

The Brain is deeper than the sea -
For - hold them - Blue to Blue -
The one the other will absorb -
As Sponges - Buckets - do -

The Brain is just the weight of God -
For - Heft them - Pound for Pound -
And they will differ - if they do -
As Syllable from Sound -

656

I started Early - Took my Dog -
And visited the Sea -
The Mermaids in the Basement
Came out to look at me -

And Frigates - in the Upper Floor
Extended Hempen Hands -
Presuming Me to be a Mouse -
Aground - upon the Sands -

But no Man moved Me - till the Tide
Went past my simple Shoe -
And past my Apron - and my Belt
And past my Boddice - too -

And made as He would eat me up -
As wholly as a Dew
Upon a Dandelion's Sleeve -
And then - I started - too -

And He - He followed - close behind -
I felt His Silver Heel
Upon my Ankle - Then My Shoes
Would overflow with Pearl -

Until We met the Solid Town -

No One He seemed to know -
And bowing - with a Mighty look -
At me - The Sea withdrew -

My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun -
 In Corners - till a Day
 The Owner passed - identified -
 And carried Me away -

And now We roam in Sovereign Woods -
 And now We hunt the Doe -
 And every time I speak for Him
 The Mountains straight reply -

And do I smile, such cordial light
 Opon the Valley glow -
 It is as a Vesuvian face
 Had let it's pleasure through -

And when at Night - Our good Day done -
 I guard My Master's Head -
 'Tis better than the Eider Duck's
 Deep Pillow - to have shared -

To foe of His - I'm deadly foe -
 None stir the second time -
 On whom I lay a Yellow Eye -
 Or an emphatic Thumb -

Though I than He - may longer live

He longer must - than I -
For I have but the power to kill,
Without - the power to die -

800

I never saw a moor,
I never saw the sea;
Yet know I how the heather looks,
And what a wave must be.
I never spoke with God,
Nor visited in heaven;
Yet certain am I of the spot
As if the chart were given.

1096

A narrow Fellow in the Grass
Occasionally rides -
You may have met him? Did you not
His notice instant is -

The Grass divides as with a Comb,
A spotted Shaft is seen,
And then it closes at your Feet
And opens further on -

He likes a Boggy Acre -
A Floor too cool for Corn -
But when a Boy and Barefoot
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash
Unbraiding in the Sun
When stooping to secure it
It wrinkled And was gone -

Several of Nature's People
I know, and they know me
I feel for them a transport
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow

Attended or alone
Without a tighter Breathing
And Zero at the Bone.

1263

Tell all the truth but tell it slant -
Success in Circuit lies
Too bright for our infirm Delight
The Truth's superb surprise
As Lightning to the Children eased
With explanation kind
The Truth must dazzle gradually
Or every man be blind -

1286

There is no Frigate like a Book
To take us Lands away
Nor any Coursers like a Page
Of prancing Poetry -
This Traverse may the poorest take
Without oppress of Toll -
How frugal is the Chariot
That bears the Human Soul -