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The Selected Poems of
Emily
Dickinson



E. Dickinson.

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Emily Dickinson



with an Introduction by Emma Hartnoll



Wordsworth Poetry Library

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1

Success

Success is counted sweetest
 By those who ne'er succeed.
 To comprehend a nectar
 Requires sorest need.

Not one of all the purple host
 Who took the flag today
 Can tell the definition,
 So clear, of victory,

As he, defeated, dying,
 On whose forbidden ear
 The distant strains of triumph
 Break, agonized and clear.

2

Real Riches

'Tis little I could care for pearls
 Who own the ample sea;
 Or brooches, when the Emperor
 With rubies pelteth me;

Or gold, who am the Prince of Mines;
 Or diamonds, when I see
 A diadem to fit a dome
 Continual crowning me.

3

I'm nobody! Who are you?
 Are you nobody, too?
 Then there's a pair of us – don't tell!
 They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong day
To an admiring bog!

4

A thought went up my mind today
That I have had before,
But did not finish, – some way back,
I could not fix the year,

Nor where it went, nor why it came
The second time to me,
Nor definitely what it was,
Have I the art to say.

But somewhere in my soul,
I know I've met the thing before;
It just reminded me – 'twas all –
And came my way no more.

5

Glee! the great storm is over!
Four have recovered the land;
Forty gone down together
Into the boiling sand.

Ring, for the scant salvation!
Toll, for the bonnie souls, –
Neighbor and friend and bridegroom,
Spinning upon the shoals!

How they will tell the shipwreck
When winter shakes the door,
Till the children ask, 'But the forty?
Did they come back no more?'

Then a silence suffuses the story,
And a softness the teller's eye;
And the children no further question,
And only the waves reply.

6

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
I shall not live in vain;
If I can ease one life the aching,
Or cool one pain,
Or help one fainting robin
Unto his nest again,
I shall not live in vain.

7

Almost!

Within my reach!
I could have touched!
I might have chanced that way!
Soft sauntered through the village,
Sauntered as soft away!
So unsuspected violets
Within the fields lie low,
Too late for striving fingers
That passed, an hour ago.

8

A wounded deer leaps highest,
I've heard the hunter tell
'Tis but the ecstasy of death,
And then the brake is still.

The smitten rock that gushes,
The trampled steel that springs:
A cheek is always redder
Just where the hectic stings!

Mirth is the mail of anguish,
In which it cautious arm,
Lest anybody spy the blood
And 'You're hurt' exclaim!

9

In a Library

A precious, mouldering pleasure 'tis
To meet an antique book,
In just the dress his century wore;
A privilege, I think,

His venerable hand to take,
And warming in our own,
A passage back, or two, to make
To times when he was young.

His quaint opinions to inspect,
His knowledge to unfold
On what concerns our mutual mind,
The literature of old;

What interested scholars most,
What competitions ran
When Plato was a certainty,
And Sophocles a man;

When Sappho was a living girl,
And Beatrice wore
The gown that Dante deified.
Facts, centuries before,

He traverses familiar,
As one should come to town
And tell you all your dreams were true:
He lived where dreams were sown.

His presence is enchantment,
You beg him not to go;
Old volumes shake their vellum heads
And tantalize, just so.

10

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.

11

Much madness is divinest sense
To a discerning eye;
Much sense the starkest madness.
'Tis the majority
In this, as all, prevails.
Assent, and you are sane;
Demur, – you're straightway dangerous,
And handled with a chain.

12

I asked no other thing,
No other was denied.
I offered Being for it;
The mighty merchant smiled.
Brazil? He twirled a button,
Without a glance my way:
'But, madam, is there nothing else
That we can show today?'

13

The soul selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I've known her from an ample nation
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

14

The Secret

Some things that fly there be, –
Birds, hours, the bumble-bee:
Of these no elegy.

Some things that stay there be, –
Grief, hills, eternity:
Nor this behooveth me.

There are, that resting, rise.
Can I expound the skies?
How still the riddle lies!

15

The Mystery of Pain

Pain has an element of blank;
It cannot recollect
When it began, or if there were
A day when it was not.

It has no future but itself,
Its infite realms contain
Its past, enlightened to perceive
New periods of pain.

16

The Lonely House

I know some lonely houses off the road
A robber'd like the look of. –
Wooden barred,
And windows hanging low,
Inviting to
A portico,
Where two could creep:
One hand the tools,
The other peep
To make sure all's asleep.
Old-fashioned eyes,
Not easy to surprise!

How orderly the kitchen'd look by night,
With just a clock, –
But they could gag the tick,
And mice won't bark;
And so the walls don't tell,
None will.

A pair of spectacles ajar just stir –
An almanac's aware.
Was it the mat winked,
Or a nervous star?
The moon slides down the stair
To see who's there.

There's plunder, – where?
Tankard, or spoon,
Earring, or stone,
A watch, some ancient brooch
To match the grandmamma,
Staid sleeping there.

Day rattles, too,
Stealth's slow;
The sun has got as far
As the third sycamore.
Screams chanticleer,

'Who's there?'
And echoes, trains away,
Sneer – 'Where?'
While the old couple, just astir,
Fancy the sunrise left the door ajar!

17

The Book of Martyrs

Read, sweet, how others strove,
Till we are stouter;
What they renounced,
Till we are less afraid;
How many times they bore
The faithful witness,
Till we are helped,
As if a kingdom cared!

Read then of faith
That shone above the fagot;
Clear strains of hymn
The river could not drown;
Brave names of men
And celestial women,
Passed out of record
Into renown!

18

The Show

The show is not the show,
But they that go.
Menagerie to me
My neighbor be.
Fair play –
Both went to see.

19

Experiment to me
Is every one I meet.
If it contain a kernel?
The figure of a nut

Presents upon a tree,
Equally plausibly;
But meat within is requisite,
To squirrels and to me.

20

The thought beneath so slight a film
Is more distinctly seen, –
As laces just reveal the surge,
Or mists the Apennine.

21

Unreturning

'Twas such a little, little boat
That toddled down the bay!
'Twas such a gallant, gallant sea
That beckoned it away!

'Twas such a greedy, greedy wave
That licked it from the coast;
Nor ever guessed the stately sails
My little craft was lost!

22

The Return

Though I get home how late, how late!
So I get home, 'twill compensate.
Better will be the ecstasy
That they have done expecting me,

When, night descending, dumb and dark,
They hear my unexpected knock.
Transporting must the moment be,
Brewed from decades of agony!

To think just how the fire will burn,
Just how long-cheated eyes will turn
To wonder what myself will say,
And what itself will say to me,
Beguiles the centuries of way!

23

I had no time to hate, because
The grave would hinder me,
And life was not so ample!
Could finish enmity.

Nor had I time to love; but since
Some industry must be,
The little toil of love, I thought,
Was large enough for me.

24

Belshazzar had a letter, –
He never had but one;
Belshazzar's correspondent
Concluded and begun
In that immortal copy
The conscience of us all
Can read without its glasses
On revelation's wall.

25

The brain within its groove
Runs evenly and true;
But let a splinter swerve,
'Twere easier for you

To put the water back
When floods have slit the hills,
And scooped a turnpike for themselves,
And blotted out the mills!

26

Rouge Gagne

'Tis so much joy! 'Tis so much joy!
If I should fail, what poverty!
And yet, as poor as I
Have ventured all upon a throw;
Have gained! Yes! Hesitated so
This side the victory!

Life is but life, and death but death!
Bliss is but bliss, and breath but breath!
And if, indeed, I fail,
At least to know the worst is sweet.
Defeat means nothing but defeat,
No drearier can prevail!

And if I gain, — oh, gun at sea,
Oh, bells that in the steeples be,
At first repeat it slow!
For heaven is a different thing
Conjectured, and waked sudden in,
And might o'erwhelm me so!

27

Rouge et Noir

Soul, wilt thou toss again?
By just such a hazard
Hundreds have lost, indeed,
But tens have won an all.

Angels' breathless ballot
Lingers to record thee;
Imps in eager caucus
Raffle for my soul.

28

To fight aloud is very brave,
But gallanter, I know,
Who charge within the bosom,
The cavalry of woe.

Who win, and nations do not see,
Who fall, and none observe,
Whose dying eyes no country
Regards with patriot love.

We trust, in plumed procession,
For such the angels go,
Rank after rank, with even feet
And uniforms of snow.

29

Reticence

The reticent volcano keeps
His never slumbering plan;
Confided are his projects pink
To no precarious man.

If nature will not tell the tale
Jehovah told to her,
Can human nature not survive
Without a listener?

Admonished by her buckled lips
Let every babbler be.
The only secret people keep
Is Immortality.

30

The nearest dream recedes, unrealized.
The heaven we chase
Like the June bee
Before the school-boy

Invites the race;
Stoops to an easy clover –
Dips – evades – teases – deploys;
Then to the royal clouds
Lifts his light pinnacle
Heedless of the boy
Staring, bewildered, at the mocking sky.

Homesick for steadfast honey,
Ah! the bee flies not
That brews that rare variety.

31

Whether my bark went down at sea,
Whether she met with gales,
Whether to isles enchanted
She bent her docile sails;

By what mystic mooring
She is held today, –
This is the errand of the eye
Out upon the bay.

32

I bring an unaccustomed wine
To lips long parching, next to mine,
And summon them to drink.

Crackling with fever, they essay;
I turn my brimming eyes away,
And come next hour to look.

The hands still hug the tardy glass;
The lips I would have cooled, alas!
Are so superfluous cold,

I would as soon attempt to warm
The bosoms where the frost has lain
Ages beneath the mould.

Some other thirsty there may be
To whom this would have pointed me
Had it remained to speak.

And so I always bear the cup
If, haply, mine may be the drop
Some pilgrim thirst to slake, –

If, haply, any say to me,
'Unto the little, unto me,'
When I at last awake.

33

Hope: 1

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.

34

Hope: 2

Hope is a subtle glutton;
He feeds upon the fair;
And yet, inspected closely,
What abstinence is there!

His is the halcyon table
That never seats but one,
And whatsoever is consumed
The same amounts remain.

35

Fire

Ashes denote that fire was;
Respect the grayest pile
For the departed creature's sake
That hovered there awhile.

Fire exists the first in light,
And then consolidates, –
Only the chemist can disclose
Into what carbonates.

36

I found the phrase to every thought
I ever had, but one;
And that defies me, – as a hand
Did try to chalk the sun

To races nurtured in the dark; –
How would your own begin?
Can blaze be done in cochineal,
Or noon in mazarin?

37

We play at paste,
Till qualified for pearl,
Then drop the paste,
And deem ourself a fool.
The shapes, though, were similar,
And our new hands
Learned gem-tactics
Practising sands.

38

The Test

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, through discipline,
Till weights will hang.
Give balm to giants,
And they'll wilt, like men.
Give Himmaleh, –
They'll carry him!

39

Escape

I never hear the word 'escape'
Without a quicker blood,
A sudden expectation,
A flying attitude.

I never hear of prisons broad
By soldiers battered down,
But I tug childish at my bars, –
Only to fail again!

40

Forbidden Fruit: 1

Forbidden fruit a flavor has
That lawful orchards mocks;
How luscious lies the pea within
The pod that Duty locks!

41

Forbidden Fruit: 2

Heaven is what I cannot reach!
The apple on the tree,
Provided it do hopeless hang,
That 'heaven' is, to me.

The color on the cruising cloud,
The interdicted ground
Behind the hill, the house behind, —
There Paradise is found!

42

A Word

A word is dead
When it is said,
Some say.
I say it just
Begins to live
That day.

43

The White Heat

Dare you see a soul at the white heat?
Then crouch within the door.
Red is the fire's common tint;
But when the vivid ore

Has sated flame's conditions,
Its quivering substance plays
Without a color but the light
Of unanointed blaze.

Least village boasts its blacksmith,
Whose anvil's even din
Stands symbol for the finer forge
That soundless tugs within,

Refining these impatient ores
With hammer and with blaze,
Until the designated light
Repudiate the forge.

44

Compensation

For each ecstatic instant
We must an anguish pay
In keen and quivering ratio
To the ecstasy.

For each beloved hour
Sharp pittances of years,
Bitter contested farthings
And coffers heaped with tears.

45

Triumph

Who never lost, are unprepared
A coronet to find;
Who never thirsted, flagons
And cooling tamarind.

Who never climbed the weary league
Can such a foot explore
The purple territories
On Pizarro's shore?

How many legions overcome?
The emperor will say.
How many colors taken
On Revolution Day?

How many bullets bearest?
The royal scar hast thou?
Angels, write 'Promoted'
On this soldier's brow!

46

Aspiration

We never know how high we are
Till we are called to rise;
And then, if we are true to plan,
Our statures touch the skies.

The heroism we recite
Would be a daily thing,
Did not ourselves the cubits warp
For fear to be a king.

47

The Inevitable

While I was fearing it, it came,
But came with less of fear,
Because that fearing it so long
Had almost made it dear.
There is a fitting a dismay,
A fitting a despair.
'Tis harder knowing it is due,
Than knowing it is here.
The trying on the utmost,
The morning it is new,
Is terribler than wearing it
A whole existence through.

48

Superiority To Fate

Superiority to fate
Is difficult to learn.
'Tis not conferred by any,
But possible to earn

A pittance at a time,
Until, to her surprise,
The soul with strict economy
Subsists till Paradise.

49

Experience

I stepped from plank to plank
So slow and cautiously;
The stars about my head I felt,
About my feet the sea.

I knew not but the next
Would be my final inch, –
This gave me that precarious gait
Some call experience.

50

Thanksgiving Day

One day is there of the series
Termed Thanksgiving day,
Celebrated part at table,
Part in memory.

Neither patriarch nor pussy,
I dissect the play;
Seems it, to my hooded thinking,
Reflex holiday.

Had there been no sharp subtraction
From the early sum,
Not an acre or a caption
Where was once a room,
Not a mention, whose small pebble
Wrinkled any bay, –
Unto such, were such assembly,
'Twere Thanksgiving day.

51

I taste a liquor never brewed,
From tankards scooped in pearl;
Not all the vats upon the Rhine
Yield such an alcohol!
Inebriate of air am I,
And debauchee of dew,
Reeling, through endless summer days,
From inns of molten blue.
When landlords turn the drunken bee
Out of the foxglove's door,
When butterflies renounce their drams,
I shall but drink the more!
Till seraphs swing their snowy hats,
And saints to windows run,
To see the little tippler
Leaning against the sun!

52

Disenchantment

It dropped so low in my regard
I heard it hit the ground,
And go to pieces on the stones
At bottom of my mind;

Yet blamed the fate that fractured, less
Than I reviled myself
For entertaining plated wares
Upon my silver shelf.

53

If the foolish call them 'flowers,'
Need the wiser tell?
If the savans 'classify' them,
It is just as well!

Those who read the *Revelations*
Must not criticise
Those who read the same edition
With beclouded eyes!

Could we stand with that old Moses
Canaan denied, –
Scan, like him, the stately landscape
On the other side, –

Doubtless we should deem superfluous
Many sciences
Not pursued by learned angels
In scholastic skies!

Low amid that glad *Belles lettres*
Grant that we may stand,
Stars, amid profound Galaxies,
At that grand 'Right hand'!

54

A Syllable

Could mortal lip divine
The undeveloped freight
Of a delivered syllable,
'Twould crumble with the weight.

55

Drowning is not so pitiful
As the attempt to rise.
Three times, 'tis said, a sinking man
Comes up to face the skies,
And then declines forever
To that abhorred abode
Where hope and he part company, –
For he is grasped of God.
The Maker's cordial visage,
However good to see,
Is shunned, we must admit it,
Like an adversity.

56

To venerate the simple days
Which lead the seasons by,
Needs but to remember
That from you or me
They may take the trifle
Termed mortality!

To invest existence with a stately air,
Needs but to remember
That the acorn there
Is the egg of forests
For the upper air!

57

How still the bells in steeples stand,
Till, swollen with the sky,
They leap upon their silver feet
In frantic melody!

58

The Past

The past is such a curious creature,
To look her in the face
A transport may reward us,
Or a disgrace.

Unarmed if any meet her,
I charge him, fly!
Her rusty ammunition
Might yet reply!

59

Remembrance

Remembrance has a rear and front, –
'Tis something like a house;
It has a garret also
For refuse and the mouse,
Besides, the deepest cellar
That ever mason hewed;
Look to it, by its fathoms
Ourselves be not pursued.

60

Philosophy

It might be easier
To fail with land in sight,
Than gain my blue peninsula
To perish of delight.

61

Griefs

I measure every grief I meet
With analytic eyes;
I wonder if it weighs like mine,
Or has an easier size.

I wonder if they bore it long,
Or did it just begin?
I could not tell the date of mine,
It feels so old a pain.

I wonder if it hurts to live,
And if they have to try,
And whether, could they choose between,
They would not rather die.

I wonder if when years have piled –
Some thousands – on the cause
Of early hurt, if such a lapse
Could give them any pause;

Or would they go on aching still
Through centuries above,
Enlightened to a larger pain
By contrast with the love.

The grieved are many, I am told;
The reason deeper lies, –
Death is but one and comes but once,
And only nails the eyes.

There's grief of want, and grief of cold, –
A sort they call 'despair';
There's banishment from native eyes,
In sight of native air.

And though I may not guess the kind
Correctly, yet to me
A piercing comfort it affords
In passing Calvary,

To note the fashions of the cross,
Of those that stand alone,
Still fascinated to presume
That some are like my own.

62

Childish Griefs

Softened by Time's consummate plush,
How sleek the woe appears
That threatened childhood's citadel
And undermined the years!
Bisected now by bleaker griefs,
We envy the despair
That devastated childhood's realm,
So easy to repair.

63

Life's Trades

It's such a little thing to weep,
So short a thing to sigh;
And yet by trades the size of these
We men and women die!

64

A Book: I

He ate and drank the precious words,
His spirit grew robust;
He knew no more that he was poor,
Nor that his frame was dust.
He danced along the dingy days,
And this bequest of wings
Was but a book. What liberty
A loosened spirit brings!

65

A Book: 2

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 a human soul!

66

A Portrait

A face devoid of love or grace,
A hateful, hard, successful face,
A face with which a stone
Would feel as thoroughly at ease
As were they old acquaintances, —
First time together thrown.

67

The Lost Thought

I felt a clearing in my mind
As if my brain had split;
I tried to match it, seam by seam,
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before,
But sequence unravelled out of reach
Like balls upon a floor.

68

With Flowers

If recollecting were forgetting,
Then I remember not;
And if forgetting, recollecting,
How near I had forgot!
And if to miss were merry,
And if to mourn were gay,
How very blithe the fingers
That gathered these today!

69

Who has not found the heaven below
Will fail of it above.
God's residence is next to mine,
His furniture is love.

70

Shipwreck

It tossed and tossed, —
A little brig I knew,
O'ertook by blast;
It spun and spun,
And groped delirious, for morn.

It slipped and slipped,
As one that drunken stepped;
Its white foot tripped,
Then dropped from sight.

Ah, brig, good-night
To crew and you;
The ocean's heart too smooth, too blue,
To break for you.

71

Saturday Afternoon

From all the jails the boys and girls
Ecstatically leap, –
Beloved, only afternoon
That prison doesn't keep.

They storm the earth and stun the air,
A mob of solid bliss.
Alas! that frowns could lie in wait
For such a foe as this!

72

The farthest thunder that I heard
Was nearer than the sky,
And rumbles still, though torrid noons
Have lain their missiles by.
The lightning that preceded it
Struck no one but myself,
But I would not exchange the bolt
For all the rest of life.
Indebtedness to oxygen
The chemist may repay,
But not the obligation
To electricity.
It finds the homes and decks the days,
And every clamor bright
Is but the gleam concomitant
Of that waylaying light.
The thought is quiet as a flake, –
A crash without a sound;
How life's reverberation
Its explanation found!

73

Power

You cannot put a fire out;
A thing that can ignite
Can go, itself, without a fan
Upon the slowest night.

You cannot fold a flood
And put it in a drawer, –
Because the winds would find it out,
And tell your cedar floor.

74

Our share of night to bear,
Our share of morning,
Our blank in bliss to fill,
Our blank in scorning.

Here a star, and there a star,
Some lose their way.
Here a mist, and there a mist,
Afterwards – day!

75

Few get enough, – enough is one;
To that ethereal throng
Have not each one of us the right
To stealthily belong?

76

Friends

Are friends delight or pain?
Could bounty but remain
Riches were good.

But if they only stay
Bolder to fly away,
Riches are sad.

77

Desire

Who never wanted, – maddest joy
Remains to him unknown;
The banquet of abstemiousness
Surpasses that of wine.

Within its hope, though yet ungrasped
Desire's perfect goal,
No nearer, lest reality
Should disentrall thy soul.

78

A Man

Fate slew him, but he did not drop;
She felled – he did not fall –
Impaled him on her fiercest stakes –
He neutralized them all.

She stung him, sapped his firm advance,
But, when her worst was done,
And he, unmoved, regarded her,
Acknowledged him a man.

79

Ventures

Finite to fail, but infinite to venture.
For the one ship that struts the shore
Many's the gallant, overwhelmed creature
Nodding in navies nevermore.

80

I have a king who does not speak;
So, wondering, thro' the hours meek
I trudge the day away, –
Half glad when it is night and sleep,
If, haply, thro' a dream to peep
In parlors shut by day.

And if I do, when morning comes,
It is as if a hundred drums
Did round my pillow roll,
And shouts fill all my childish sky,
And bells keep saying 'victory'
From steeples in my soul!

And if I don't, the little Bird
Within the Orchard is not heard,
And I omit to pray,
'Father, thy will be done' today,
For my will goes the other way,
And it were perjury!

81

Life, and Death, and Giants
Such as these, are still.
Minor apparatus, hopper of the mill,
Beetle at the candle,
Or a fife's small fame,
Maintain by accident
That they proclaim.

82

The bone that has no marrow;
What ultimate for that?
It is not fit for table,
For beggar, or for cat.

A bone has obligations,
A being has the same;
A marrowless assembly
Is culpabler than shame.

But how shall finished creatures
A function fresh obtain? –
Old Nicodemus' phantom
Confronting us again!

83

The Brain

The brain is wider than the sky,
For, put them side by side,
The one the other will include
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, lift them, pound for pound,
And they will differ, if they do,
As syllable from sound.

84

Alpine Glow

Our lives are Swiss, –
So still, so cool,
Till, some odd afternoon,
The Alps neglect their curtains,
And we look farther on.

Italy stands the other side,
While, like a guard between,
The solemn Alps,
The siren Alps,
Forever intervene!

85

Contrast

A door just opened on a street –
I, lost, was passing by –
An instant's width of warmth disclosed,
And wealth, and company.

The door as sudden shut, and I,
I, lost, was passing by, –
Lost doubly, but by contrast most,
Enlightening misery.

86

Lost Faith

To lose one's faith surpasses
The loss of an estate,
Because estates can be
Replenished, – faith cannot.

Inherited with life,
Belief but once can be;
Annihilate a single clause,
And Being's beggary.

87

Lost Joy

I had a daily bliss
I half indifferent viewed,
Till sudden I perceived it stir, –
It grew as I pursued,
Till when, around a crag,
It wasted from my sight,
Enlarged beyond my utmost scope,
I learned its sweetness right.

88

Faith is a fine invention
For gentlemen who see;
But microscopes are prudent
In an emergency!

89

A Prayer

I meant to have but modest needs,
Such as content, and heaven;
Within my income these could lie,
And life and I keep even.

But since the last included both,
It would suffice my prayer
But just for one to stipulate,
And grace would grant the pair.

And so, upon this wise I prayed, –
Great Spirit, give to me
A heaven not so large as yours,
But large enough for me.

A smile suffused Jehovah's face;
The cherubim withdrew;
Grave saints stole out to look at me,
And showed their dimples, too.

I left the place with all my might, –
My prayer away I threw;
The quiet ages picked it up,
And Judgment twinkled, too,

That one so honest be extant
As take the tale for true
That 'Whatsoever you shall ask,
Itself be given you.'

But I, grown shrewder, scan the skies
With a suspicious air, –
As children, swindled for the first,
All swindlers be, infer.

90

Hunger

I had been hungry all the years;
My noon had come, to dine;
I, trembling, drew the table near,
And touched the curious wine.

'Twas this on tables I had seen,
When turning, hungry, lone,
I looked in windows, for the wealth
I could not hope to own.

I did not know the ample bread,
'Twas so unlike the crumb
The birds and I had often shared
In Nature's dining-room.

The plenty hurt me, 'twas so new. —
Myself felt ill and odd,
As berry of a mountain bush
Transplanted to the road.

Nor was I hungry; so I found
That hunger was a way
Of persons outside windows,
The entering takes away.

91

Surgeons must be very careful
When they take the knife!
Underneath their fine incisions
Stirs the Culprit, — Life!

92

Called Back

Just lost when I was saved!
Just felt the world go by!
Just girt me for the onset with eternity,

When breath blew back,
And on the other side
I heard recede the disappointed tide!

Therefore, as one returned, I feel,
Odd secrets of the line to tell!
Some sailor, skirting foreign shores,
Some pale reporter from the awful doors
Before the seal!

Next time, to stay!
Next time, the things to see
By ear unheard,
Unscrutinized by eye.

Next time, to tarry,
While the ages steal, –
Slow tramp the centuries,
And the cycles wheel.

93

Is Heaven a physician?
They say that He can heal;
But medicine posthumous
Is unavailable.

Is Heaven an exchequer?
They speak of what we owe;
But that negotiation
I'm not a party to.

94

The Goal

Each life converges to some centre
Expressed or still;
Exists in every human nature
A goal,

Admitted scarcely to itself, it may be.
 Too fair
 For credibility's temerity
 To dare.

Adored with caution, as a brittle heaven,
 To reach
 Were hopeless as the rainbow's raiment
 To touch,

Yet persevered toward, surer for the distance;
 How high
 Unto the saints' slow diligence
 The sky!

Ungained, it may be, by a life's low venture,
 But then,
 Eternity enables the endeavoring
 Again.

95

I many times thought peace had come,
 When peace was far away;
 As wrecked men deem they sight the land
 At centre of the sea,

And struggle slacker, but to prove,
 As hopelessly as I,
 How many the fictitious shores
 Before the harbor lie.

96

Melodies Unheard

Musicians wrestle everywhere:
 All day, among the crowded air,
 I hear the silver strife;
 And – waking long before the dawn –
 Such transport breaks upon the town
 I think it that 'new life!'

It is not bird, it has no nest;
Nor band, in brass and scarlet dressed,
Nor tambourine, nor man;
It is not hymn from pulpit read, –
The morning stars the treble led
On time's first afternoon!

Some say it is the spheres at play!
Some say that bright majority
Of vanished dames and men!
Some think it service in the place
Where we, with late, celestial face,
Please God, shall ascertain!

97

On the bleakness of my lot
Bloom I strove to raise.
Late, my acre of a rock
Yielded grape and maize.
Soil of flint if steadfast tilled
Will reward the hand;
Seed of palm by Lybian sun
Fructified in sand.

98

Returning

I years had been from home,
And now, before the door,
I dared not open, lest a face
I never saw before
Stare vacant into mine
And ask my business there.
My business, – just a life I left,
Was such still dwelling there?

I fumbled at my nerve,
I scanned the windows near;
The silence like an ocean rolled,
And broke against my ear.

I laughed a wooden laugh
That I could fear a door,
Who danger and the dead had faced,
But never quaked before.

I fitted to the latch
My hand, with trembling care,
Lest back the awful door should spring,
And leave me standing there.

I moved my fingers off
As cautiously as glass,
And held my ears, and like a thief
Fled gasping from the house.

99

Too Much

I should have been too glad, I see,
Too lifted for the scant degree
Of life's penurious round;
My little circuit would have shamed
This new circumference, have blamed
The homelier time behind.

I should have been too saved, I see,
Too rescued; fear too dim to me
That I could spell the prayer
I knew so perfect yesterday, –
That scalding one, 'Sabachthani,'
Recited fluent here.

Earth would have been too much, I see,
And heaven not enough for me;
I should have had the joy
Without the fear to justify, –
The palm without the Calvary;
So, Saviour, crucify.

Defeat whets victory, they say;
The reefs in old Gethsemane
 Endear the shore beyond.
'Tis beggars banquets best define;
'Tis thirsting vitalizes wine, –
 Faith faints to understand.

100

Sight

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 lightning's jointed 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.

101

Heart not so heavy as mine,
Wending late home,
As it passed my window
Whistled itself a tune, –

A careless snatch, a ballad,
 A ditty of the street;
 Yet to my irritated ear
 An anodyne so sweet,

It was as if a bobolink,
 Sauntering this way,
 Carolled and mused and carolled,
 Then bubbled slow away.

It was as if a chirping brook
 Upon a toilsome way
 Set bleeding feet to minuets
 Without the knowing why.

Tomorrow, night will come again,
 Weary, perhaps, and sore.
 Ah, bugle, by my window,
 I pray you stroll once more!

102

Portraits are to daily faces
 As an evening west
 To a fine, pedantic sunshine
 In a satin vest.

103

The Preacher

He preached upon 'breadth' till it argued him narrow, –
 The broad are too broad to define;
 And of 'truth' until it proclaimed him a liar, –
 The truth never flaunted a sign.

Simplicity fled from his counterfeit presence
 As gold the pyrites would shun.
 What confusion would cover the innocent Jesus
 To meet so enabled a man!

104

Prayer

Prayer is the little implement
Through which men reach
Where presence is denied them.
They fling their speech

By means of it in God's ear;
If then He hear,
This sums the apparatus
Comprised in prayer.

105

To help our bleaker parts
Salubrious hours are given,
Which if they do not fit for earth
Drill silently for heaven.

106

Enough

God gave a loaf to every bird,
But just a crumb to me;
I dare not eat it, though I starve, –
My poignant luxury
To own it, touch it, prove the feat
That made the pellet mine, –
Too happy in my sparrow chance
For ampler coveting.

It might be famine all around,
I could not miss an ear,
Such plenty smiles upon my board,
My garner shows so fair.
I wonder how the rich may feel, –
An Indiaman – an Earl?
I deem that I with but a crumb
Am sovereign of them all.



The Selected Poems of
Emily Dickinson
with an Introduction by Emma Hartnoll

The daughter of a lawyer from Amherst, Massachusetts, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) was initially a vivacious, outgoing person, but she progressively withdrew into a reclusive existence. Emily was a truly undiscovered genius during her lifetime and astonishingly only seven out of her total of 1,775 poems were published prior to her death. She had an immense breadth of vision and a passionate intensity and awe for life, love, nature, time and eternity. Originally branded an eccentric, Emily Dickinson is now recognized as a major poet of great depth, startling originality and courage - for as she wrote: 'Assent and you are sane; / Demur, you're straightaway dangerous / And handled with a chain'.

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