

The  
Poems of  
Emily  
Dickinson

With an Introduction by  
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## Part One Life

### Epigram

*THIS is my letter to the world,  
That never wrote to me,—  
The simple news that Nature told,  
With tender majesty.*

*Her message is committed  
To hands I cannot see;  
For love of her, sweet countrymen,  
Judge tenderly of me!*

**I**

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 to-day  
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.

**II**

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!

**III**

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.

**IV**

'T is so much joy! 'T is 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!

**V**

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.

**VI**

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.

**VII**

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.

**VIII**

A wounded deer leaps highest,  
I 've heard the hunter tell;  
'T is 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 caution arm,  
Lest anybody spy the blood  
And "You 're hurt" exclaim!

**IX**

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.

**X**

A PRECIOUS, mouldering pleasure 't is  
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 born.

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

## **XI**

MUCH madness is divinest sense  
To a discerning eye;  
Much sense the starkest madness.  
'T is the majority  
In this, as all, prevails.  
Assent, and you are sane;  
Demur,—you 're straightway dangerous,  
And handled with a chain.

## **XII**

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 to-day?”