

## **Twelve Poems of Emily Dickinson as set by Aaron Copland**

### **1. Nature, the gentlest mother**

Nature, the gentlest mother  
Impatient of no child,  
The feeblest or the waywardest, –  
Her admonition mild

In forest and the hill  
By traveller is heard,  
Restraining rampant squirrel  
Or too impetuous bird.

How fair her conversation,  
A summer afternoon, –  
Her household, her assembly;  
And when the sun goes down

Her voice among the aisles  
Incites the timid prayer  
Of the minutest cricket,  
The most unworthy flower.

When all the children sleep  
She turns as long away  
As will suffice to light her lamps;  
Then, bending from the sky,

With infinite affection  
And infiner care,  
Her golden finger on her lip,  
Wills silence everywhere.

### **2. There came a wind like a bugle**

There came a wind like a bugle,  
It quivered through the grass,  
And a green chill upon the heat  
so ominous did pass.

We barred the windows and the doors  
As from an emerald ghost

The doom's electric moccasin  
that very instant passed.

On a strange mob of panting trees,  
and fences fled away,  
And rivers where the houses ran  
the living looked that day,

The bell within the steeple wild,  
The flying tidings whirled.  
How much can come and much can go,  
And yet abide the world!

### **3. Why do they shut me out of Heaven?**

Why do they shut me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing too loud?  
But I can sing a little minor,  
Timid as a bird.

Wouldn't the angels try me  
just once more  
Just see if I troubled them . . . .  
But don't shut the door!

Oh if I were the gentlemen  
in the white robes  
and they were the little hand that knocked,  
Could I forbid?

Why do they shut me out of Heaven?  
Did I sing too loud?

### **4. The world feels dusty**

The world feels dusty,  
when we stop to die . . .  
We want the dew then  
Honors taste dry . . .

Flags vex a dying face  
But the least fan  
stirred by a friend's hand  
Cools like the rain

Mine be the ministry  
when thy thirst comes . . .  
Dews of thyself to fetch  
and holy balms.

### **5. Heart, we will forget him**

Heart, we will forget him  
You and I, tonight.  
You may forget the warmth he gave,  
I will forget the light.

When you have done, pray tell me,  
That I my thoughts may dim;  
Haste! lest while you're lagging,  
I may remember him.

### **6. Dear March, come in!**

Dear March, come in!  
How glad I am!  
I looked for you before.  
Put down your hat –  
You must have walked –  
How out of breath you are.  
Dear March, how are you?  
And the rest?  
Did you leave Nature well?  
Oh, March, come right upstairs with me,  
I have so much to tell.

I got your letter and the bird's;  
The maples never knew  
That you were coming, –I declare,  
How red their faces grew!  
But, March, forgive me.  
And all those hills  
you left for me to hue,  
There was no purple suitable,  
You took it all with you.

Who knocks? that April?  
Lock the door!

I will not be pursued!  
He stayed away a year, to call  
when I am occupied.  
But trifles look so trivial  
As soon as you have come,  
And blame is just as dear as praise  
And praise as mere as blame.

### **7. Sleep is supposed to be**

Sleep is supposed to be,  
By souls of sanity,  
The shutting of the eye.

Sleep is the station grand  
Down which on either hand  
The hosts of witness stand.

Morn is supposed to be,  
By people of degree,  
The breaking of the day.

Morning has not occurred.  
That shall aurora be  
East of Eternity;

One with the banner gay,  
One in the red array, –  
That is the break of day.

### **8. When they come back**

When they come back – if Blossoms do –  
I always feel a doubt  
If Blossoms can be born again  
When once the Art is out –

When they begin, if Robins do,  
I always had a fear  
I did not tell, it was their last Experiment  
Last Year.

When it is May, if May return,  
Has nobody a pang

that on a face so beautiful  
we might not look again?

If I am there – One does not know  
What Party – One may be  
Tomorrow, but if I *am* there  
I take back all I say –

### **9. I felt a funeral in my brain**

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.

### **10. I've heard an organ talk sometimes**

I've heard an organ talk sometimes  
In a cathedral aisle  
And understood no word it said.  
Yet held my breath the while . . .  
And risen up and gone away,  
A more Bernardine girl  
And know not what was done to me  
In that old hallowed aisle.

## 11. Going to Heaven!

Going to Heaven!  
I don't know when,  
Pray do not ask me how, –  
Indeed I'm too astonished  
To think of answering you!  
Going to Heaven! –  
How dim it sounds!  
And yet it will be done  
As sure as flocks go home at night  
Unto the shepherd's arm!

Perhaps you're going too!  
Who knows?  
If you should get there first  
Save just a little place for me,  
Close to the two I lost –  
The smallest "robe" will fit me,  
And just a bit of "crown" –  
For you know we do not mind our dress  
When we are going home.

Going to Heaven!  
I'm glad I don't believe it  
For it would stop my breath  
And I'd like to look a little more  
At such a curious earth!  
I am glad they did believe it  
Whom I have never found  
Since the mighty autumn afternoon  
I left them in the ground.

## 12. The Chariot

Because I would 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 labour, and my leisure too  
For His Civility –

We passed the school, where children played,  
Their lessons scarcely done,  
We passed the fields of gazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun.

We paused before a house that seemed  
a swelling of the ground;  
The roof was scarcely visible,  
The cornice but a mound.

Since then 'tis centuries; but each  
Feels shorter than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were toward eternity.