

Four Dickinson Songs

Poems by Emily Dickinson

Safe in Their Alabaster Chambers

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 disc of snow.

There's a Certain Slant of Light

There's a certain slant of light,
Winter afternoons,
That oppresses, like the weight
Of cathedral tunes.

Heavenly hurt it gives us;
We can find no scar,
But internal difference,
Where the meanings are.

None can teach it anything
'T is the seal despair,
An imperial affliction
Sent us of the air.

When it comes, the landscape listens,
Shadows hold their breath;
When it goes, 't is like the distance
On the look of death.

A Bird Came Down the Walk

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 sideways to the wall
To let a beetle pass.

He glanced with rapid eyes
That hurried all around,
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.

Because I Could Not Stop for Death

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 in 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.