

## **The White Election**

A Cycle of 32 Songs

Music by Gordon Getty

Poems by Emily Dickinson

1. (c. 1864)

I sing to use the waiting,  
My bonnet but to tie  
And shut the door unto my house,  
No more to do have I

Till his best step approaching,  
We journey to the day  
And tell each other how we sang  
To keep the dark away.

2. (c. 1858)

There is a morn by men unseen  
Whose maids upon remoter green  
Keep their seraphic May,  
And all day long, with dance and game,  
And gambol I may never name,  
Employ their holiday.

Here to light measure move the feet  
Which walk no more the village street  
Nor by the wood are found,  
Here are the birds that sought the sun  
When last year's distaff idle hung,  
And summer's brows were bound.

Ne'er saw I such a wondrous scene,  
Ne'er such a ring on such a green  
Nor so serene array,  
As if the stars, some summer night,  
Should swing their cups of Chrysolite  
And revel till the day.

Like thee to dance, like thee to sing,  
People upon the mystic green,  
I ask each new May morn.  
I wait thy far fantastic bells  
Announcing me in other dells

Unto the different dawn!

3. (c. 1858)

I had a guinea golden,  
I lost it in the sand,  
And though the sum was simple  
And pounds were in the land,  
Still, had it such a value  
Unto my frugal eye,  
That when I could not find it  
I sat me down to sigh.

I had a crimson robin  
Who sang full many a day,  
But when the woods were painted,  
He too did fly away.  
Time brought me other robins,  
Their ballads were the same,  
Still, for my missing troubadour  
I kept the "house at hame".

I had a star in heaven,  
One "Pleiad" was its name,  
And when I was not heeding  
It wandered from the same.  
And though the skies are crowded,  
And all the night ashine,  
I do not care about it  
Since none of them are mine.

My story has a moral;  
I have a missing friend,  
"Pleiad" its name, and robin,  
And guinea in the sand.  
And when this mournful ditty,  
Accompanied with tear,

Shall meet the eye of traitor  
In country far from here,  
Grant that repentance solemn  
May seize upon his mind,  
And he no consolation  
Beneath the sun may find.

4. (late 1858)

If she had been the mistletoe  
And I had been the rose,  
How gay upon your table  
My velvet life to close.  
Since I am of the Druid,  
And she is of the dew,  
I'll deck tradition's buttonhole  
And send the rose to you.

5. (c. 1859)

New feet within my garden go,  
New fingers stir the sod.  
A troubadour upon the elm  
Betrays the solitude.

New children play upon the green,  
New weary sleep below,  
And still the pensive spring returns,  
And still the punctual snow!

6. (c. 1859)

She bore it till the simple veins  
Traced azure on her hand,  
Till pleading, round her quiet eyes  
The purple crayons stand.

Till daffodils had come and gone,  
I cannot tell the sum,  
And then she ceased to bear it  
And with the saints sat down.

No more her patient figure  
At twilight soft to meet,  
No more her timid bonnet  
Upon the village street,

But crowns instead and courtiers  
And in the midst so fair,  
Whose but her shy, immortal face  
Of whom we're whispering here?

7. (c. 1860)

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.

8. (c. 1860)

I should not dare to leave my friend;  
Because, because if he should die  
While I was gone, and I too late  
Should reach the heart that wanted me,

If I should disappoint the eyes  
That hunted, hunted so to see  
And could not bear to shut until  
They noticed me, they noticed me,

If I should stab the patient faith  
So sure I'd come, so sure I'd come,  
It listening, listening went to sleep  
Telling my tardy name,

My heart would wish it broke before,  
Since breaking then, since breaking then  
Were useless as next morning's sun  
Where midnight frosts had lain!

## Part Two: So We Must Meet Apart

9. (early 1862)

There came a day at summer's full  
Entirely for me;  
I thought that such were for the saints  
Where resurrections be.

The sun as common went abroad,  
The flowers accustomed blew,  
As if no soul the solstice passed  
That maketh all things new.

The time was scarce profaned by speech;  
The symbol of a word  
Was needless as, at Sacrament,  
The wardrobe of our Lord.

Each was to each the sealed church,  
Permitted to commune  
This time, lest we too awkward show  
At Supper of the Lamb.

The hours slid fast, as hours will,  
Clutched tight by greedy hands,  
So faces on two decks look back,  
Bound to opposing lands.

And so when all the time had leaked,  
Without external sound  
Each bound the other's crucifix,  
We gave no other bond,

Sufficient troth that we shall rise,  
Deposed, at length, the grave,  
To that new marriage justified  
Through Calvaries of love.

10. (c. 1862)

The first day's night had come,  
And grateful that a thing  
So terrible had been endured,  
I told my soul to sing.

She said her strings were snapped,  
Her bow to atoms blown,  
And so to mend her gave me work  
Until another morn.

And then a day as huge  
As yesterdays in pairs  
Unrolled its horror in my face  
Until it blocked my eyes,

My brain began to laugh,  
I mumbled like a fool,  
And though 'tis years ago, that day,  
My brain keeps giggling still.

And something's odd within;  
That person that I was  
And this one do not feel the same.  
Could it be madness, this?

11. (c. 1862)

The soul selects her own society  
Then shuts the door;  
To her divine majority  
Present no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariots pausing  
At her low gate,  
Unmoved, an emperor be kneeling  
Upon her mat.

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

12. (early 1862)

It was not death, for I stood up  
And all the dead lie down,  
It was not night, for all the bells  
Put out their tongues for noon.

It was not frost, for on my flesh  
I felt siroccos crawl,  
Not fire, for just my marble feet  
Could keep a chancel cool.

And yet it tasted like them all.  
The figures I have seen  
Set orderly for burial  
Reminded me of mine,

As if my life were shaven  
And fitted to a frame,  
And could not breathe without a key,  
And 'twas like midnight some,

When everything that ticked has stopped  
And space stares all around,  
Or grisly frosts, first autumn morns,  
Repeal the beating ground,

But most like chaos, stopless, cool,  
Without a chance or spar,  
Or even a report of land  
To justify despair.

13. (early 1862)

When I was small, a woman died;  
Today her only boy  
Went up from the Potomac,  
His face all victory

To look at her. How slowly  
The seasons must have turned,  
Till bullets clipped an angle  
And he passed quickly round.

If pride shall be in paradise,  
Ourselves cannot decide;

Of their imperial conduct  
No person testified.

But proud in apparition,  
That woman and her boy  
Pass back and forth before my brain,  
As even in the sky

I'm confident that bravos  
Perpetual break abroad  
For braveries remote as this  
In scarlet Maryland.

14. (early 1862)

I cried at pity, not at pain.  
I heard a woman say  
"Poor child," and something in her voice  
Convicted me of me.

So long I fainted, to myself  
It seemed the common way,  
And health and laughter, curious things  
To look at, like a toy.

To sometimes hear "rich people" buy,  
And see the parcel rolled  
And carried, I supposed, to heaven,  
For children made of gold,

But not to touch, or wish for,  
Or think of, with a sigh,  
And so and so had been to me,  
Had God willed differently.

I wish I knew that woman's name,  
So when she comes this way,  
To hold my life, and hold my ears  
For fear I hear her say

She's "sorry I am dead" again,  
Just when the grave and I  
Have sobbed ourselves almost to sleep,  
Our only lullaby.



15. (c. 1862)

The night was wide, and furnished scant  
With but a single star  
That often as a cloud it met  
Blew out itself for fear.

The wind pursued the little bush  
And drove away the leaves  
November left, then clambered up  
And fretted in the eaves.

No squirrel went abroad.  
A dog's belated feet,  
Like intermittent plush, he heard  
Adown the empty street.

To feel if blinds be fast,  
And closer to the fire  
Her little rocking chair to draw,  
And shiver for the poor,

The housewife's gentle task.  
"How pleasanter," said she  
Unto the sofa opposite,  
"The sleet than May, no thee."

16. (c. 1862)

I cannot live with you.  
It would be life,  
And life is over there  
Behind the shelf

The sexton keeps the key to,  
Putting up  
Our life, his porcelain,  
Like a cup

Discarded of the housewife,  
Quaint or broke:  
A newer Sevres pleases,  
Old ones crack.

I could not die with you,  
For one must wait  
To shut the other's gaze down,  
You could not,

And I, could I stand by  
And see you freeze,  
Without my right of frost,  
Death's privilege?

Nor could I rise with you,  
Because your face  
Would put out Jesus,  
That new grace

Glow plain and foreign  
On my homesick eye,  
Except that you than he  
Shone closer by.

They'd judge us. How?  
For you served heaven, you know,  
Or sought to.  
I could not,

Because you saturated sight,  
And I had no more eyes  
For sordid excellence  
As paradise.

And were you lost, I would be,  
Though my name  
Rang loudest  
On the heavenly fame.

And were you saved,  
And I condemned to be  
Where you were not,  
That self were hell to me.

So we must meet apart,  
You there, I here,  
With just the door ajar

That oceans are, and prayer,  
And that white sustenance,  
Despair.

### **Part Three: Almost Peace**

17. (c. 1862)

My first well day, since many ill,  
I asked to go abroad  
And take the sunshine in my hands,  
And see the things in pod

A blossom just when I went in,  
To take my chance with pain,  
Uncertain if myself or he  
Should prove the strongest one.

The summer deepened while we strove.  
She put some flowers away,  
And redder cheeked ones in their stead,  
A fond, illusive way.

To cheat herself it seemed she tried,  
As if before a child  
To fade. Tomorrow rainbows held,  
The sepulchre could hide,

She dealt a fashion to the nut,  
She tied the hoods to seeds,  
She dropped bright scraps of tint about,  
And left Brazilian threads

On every shoulder that she met,  
Then both her hands of haze  
Put up, to hide her parting grace  
From our unfitted eyes.

My loss by sickness, Was it loss,  
Or that ethereal gain  
One earns by measuring the grave,  
Then measuring the sun?

18. (c. 1862)

It ceased to hurt me, though so slow  
I could not feel the anguish go,  
But only knew by looking back  
That something had benumbed the track.

Nor when it altered I could say,  
For I had worn it every day  
As constant as the childish frock  
I hung upon the peg at night,

But not the grief. That nestled close  
As needles ladies softly press  
To cushions' cheeks to keep their place.

Nor what consoled it I could trace,  
Except whereas 'twas wilderness,  
It's better, almost peace.

19. (c. 1862)

I like to see it lap the miles  
And lick the valleys up,  
And stop to feed itself at tanks,  
And then prodigious step

Around a pile of mountains,  
And supercilious peer  
In shanties by the sides of roads,  
And then a quarry pare

To fit its ribs and crawl between,  
Complaining all the while  
In horrid hooting stanza,  
Then chase itself downhill

And neigh like Boanerges,  
Then, punctual as a star,  
Stop, docile and omnipotent,  
At its own stable door.

20; (c. 1864)

Split the lark and you'll find the music,  
Bulb after bulb in silver rolled,

Scantly dealt to the summer morning,  
Saved for your ear when lutes be old.

Loose the flood, you shall find it patent  
Gush after gush reserved for you.  
Scarlet experiment! Skeptic Thomas!  
Now do you doubt that your bird was true?

21. (c. 1866)

The crickets sang and set the sun,  
And workmen finished one by one  
Their seam the day upon.

The low grass loaded with the dew;  
The twilight stood as strangers do,  
With hat in hand, polite and new  
To stay as if, or go.

A vastness as a neighbor came,  
A wisdom without face or name,  
A peace as hemispheres at home,  
And so the night became.

22. (c. 1869)

After a hundred years  
Nobody knows the place,  
Agony that enacted there  
Motionless as peace.

Weeds triumphant ranged;  
Strangers strolled and spelled  
At the lone orthography  
Of the elder dead.

Winds of summer fields  
Recollect the way,  
Instinct picking up the key  
Dropped by memory.

23. (c. 1870)

The clouds their backs together laid,  
The north begun to push,

The forests galloped till they fell,  
The lightning played like mice.

The thunder crumbled like a stuff.  
How good to be in tombs,  
Where nature's temper cannot reach,  
Nor missile ever comes.

24. (c. 1877)

I shall not murmur if at last  
The ones I loved below  
Permission have to understand  
For what I shunned them so.  
Divulging it would rest my heart,  
But it would ravage theirs.  
Why, Katie, treason has a voice,  
But mine dispels in tears.

#### **Part Four: My Feet Slip Nearer**

25. (date unknown)

The grave my little cottage is,  
Where keeping house for thee,  
I make my parlor orderly  
And lay the marble tea

For two divided briefly,  
A cycle it may be,  
Till everlasting life unite  
In strong society.

26. (date unknown)

I did not reach thee, but my feet  
Slip nearer every day,  
Three rivers and a hill to cross,  
One desert and a sea;  
I shall not count the journey one  
When I am telling thee.

Two deserts, but the year is cold,  
So that will help the sand;

One desert crossed, the second one  
Will feel as cool as land.  
Sahara is too little price  
To pay for thy right hand.

The sea comes last. Step merry, feet,  
So short we have to go,  
To play together we are prone,  
But we must labor now;  
The last shall be the lightest load  
That we have had to draw.

The sun goes crooked.  
That is night,  
Before he makes the bend.  
We must have passed the middle sea.  
Almost we wish the end  
Were further off;  
Too great it seems  
So near the whole to stand.

We step like plush,  
We stand like snow,  
The waters murmur new.  
Three rivers and the hill are passed,  
Two deserts and the sea!  
Now death usurps my premium,  
And gets the look at thee.

27. (c. 1882)

My wars are laid away in books;  
I have one battle more,  
A foe whom I have never seen  
But oft has scanned me o'er,  
And hesitated me between  
And others at my side,  
But chose the best, neglecting me,  
Till all the rest have died.  
How sweet if I am not forgot  
By chums that passed away,  
Since playmates at threescore and ten  
Are such a scarcity!

28. (c. 1883)

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  
Those looked that lived that day.  
The bell within the steeple wild  
The flying tidings told:  
How much can come,  
And much can go,  
And yet abide the world!

29. (mid-1884)

The going from a world we know,  
To one a wonder still  
Is like the child's adversity  
Whose vista is a hill.  
Behind the hill is sorcery  
And everything unknown,  
But will the secret compensate  
For climbing it alone?

30. (late 1884)

Upon his saddle sprung a bird  
And crossed a thousand trees;  
Before a fence without a fare  
His fantasy did please.  
And then he lifted up his throat  
And squandered such a note,  
A universe that overheard  
Is stricken by it yet.

31. (date unknown)



Beauty crowds me till I die,  
Beauty, mercy have on me,  
But if I expire today  
Let it be in sight of thee.

32. (c. 1864)

I sing to use the waiting,  
My bonnet but to tie  
And shut the door unto my house,  
No more to do have I

Till his best step approaching,  
We journey to the day  
And tell each other how we sang  
To keep the dark away.