

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.