

Selected Poems
Emily Dickinson

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Published by Larkspur Press

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Life.

Superiority To Fate.

Superiority to fate

Is difficult to learn.

'T is not conferred by any,

But possible to earn

A pittance at a time,

Until, to her surprise,

The soul with strict economy

Subsists till Paradise.

Griefs.

I measure every grief I meet

With analytic eyes;

I wonder if it weighs like mine,

Or has an easier size.

I wonder if they bore it long,

Or did it just begin?

I could not tell the date of mine,

It feels so old a pain.

I wonder if it hurts to live,
And if they have to try,
And whether, could they choose between,
They would not rather die.

I wonder if when years have piled —
Some thousands — on the cause
Of early hurt, if such a lapse
Could give them any pause;

Or would they go on aching still
Through centuries above,
Enlightened to a larger pain
By contrast with the love.

The grieved are many, I am told;

The reason deeper lies, —

Death is but one and comes but once,

And only nails the eyes.

There's grief of want, and grief of cold, —

A sort they call 'despair;'

There's banishment from native eyes,

In sight of native air.

And though I may not guess the kind

Correctly, yet to me

A piercing comfort it affords

In passing Calvary,

To note the fashions of the cross,

Of those that stand alone,

Still fascinated to presume

That some are like my own.

Alpine Glow.

Our lives are Swiss, —
So still, so cool,
Till, some odd afternoon,
The Alps neglect their curtains,
And we look farther on.

Italy stands the other side,
While, like a guard between,
The solemn Alps,
The siren Alps,
Forever intervene!

Love.

Satisfied

One blessing had I, than the rest
So larger to my eyes
That I stopped gauging, satisfied,
For this enchanted size.

It was the limit of my dream,
The focus of my prayer, —
A perfect, paralyzing bliss
Contented as despair.

I knew no more of want or cold,
Phantasms both become,
For this new value in the soul,
Supremest earthly sum.

The heaven below the heaven above
Obscured with ruddier hue.
Life's latitude leant over-full;
The judgment perished, too.

Why joys so scantily disburse,
Why Paradise defer,
Why floods are served to us in bowls, —
I speculate no more.

Love's Humility.

My worthiness is all my doubt,
His merit all my fear,
Contrasting which, my qualities
Do lowlier appear;

Lest I should insufficient prove
For his beloved need,
The chiefest apprehension
Within my loving creed.

So I, the undivine abode
Of his elect content,
Conform my soul as 't were a church
Unto her sacrament.

Love.

Love is anterior to life,
Posterior to death,
Initial of creation, and
The exponent of breath.

Nature.

The Tulip.

She slept beneath a tree
Remembered but by me.
I touched her cradle mute;
She recognized the foot,
Put on her carmine suit, —
And see!

Cobwebs.

The spider as an artist
Has never been employed
Though his surpassing merit
Is freely certified

By every broom and Bridget
Throughout a Christian land.
Neglected son of genius,
I take thee by the hand.

A Well.

What mystery pervades a well!

The water lives so far,

Like neighbor from another world

Residing in a jar.

The grass does not appear afraid;

I often wonder he

Can stand so close and look so bold

At what is dread to me.

Related somehow they may be, —
The sedge stands next the sea,
Where he is floorless, yet of fear
No evidence gives he.

But nature is a stranger yet;
The ones that cite her most
Have never passed her haunted house,
Nor simplified her ghost.

To pity those that know her not
Is helped by the regret
That those who know her, know her less
The nearer her they get.

Designed by brynn Wendell

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Designed in Adobe InDesign

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Though his surpassing merit
Is freely certified”

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