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Emily Dickinson (1830–86). Complete Poems. 1924.

Part One: Life

XIII

THE SOUL selects her own society,
Then shuts the door;
On her divine majority
Obtrude no more.

Unmoved, she notes the chariot's pausing 5
At her low gate;
Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling
Upon her mat.

I 've known her from an ample nation 10
Choose one;
Then close the valves of her attention
Like stone.

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Emily Dickinson (1830–86). Complete Poems. 1924.

Part One: Life

VI

If I can stop one heart from breaking,
 I shall not live in vain;
 If I can ease one life the aching,
 Or cool one pain,
 Or help one fainting robin
 Unto his nest again,
 I shall not live in vain.

5

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Walt Whitman (1819–1892). Leaves of Grass. 1900.

193. **O Captain! My Captain!**

1

O CAPTAIN! my Captain! our fearful trip is done;
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we sought is won;
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring:
But O heart! heart! heart!
 O the bleeding drops of [red](#),
 Where on the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

5

2

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills;
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding;
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
 This arm beneath your [head](#);
 It is some dream that on the deck,
 You've fallen cold and dead.

10

15

3

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip, the victor ship, comes in with object won;
Exult, O shores, and ring, O bells!
 But I, with [mournful](#) tread,
 Walk the deck my Captain lies,
 Fallen cold and dead.

20

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I Hear America Singing

I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,
Those of mechanics, each one singing his as it should be blithe and strong,
The carpenter singing his as he measures his plank or beam,
The mason singing his as he makes ready for work, or leaves off work,
The boatman singing what belongs to him in his boat, the deckhand
singing on the steamboat deck,
The shoemaker singing as he sits on his bench, the hatter singing as
he stands,
The wood-cutter's song, the ploughboy's on his way in the morning,
or at noon intermission or at sundown,
The delicious singing of the mother, or of the young wife at work,
or of the girl sewing or washing,
Each singing what belongs to him or her and to none else,
The day what belongs to the day—at night the party of young
fellows, robust, friendly,
Singing with open mouths their strong melodious songs.

A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother burns bacon

From the first it had been like a
Ballad. It had the beat inevitable. It had the blood.
A wildness cut up, and tied in little bunches,
Like the four-line stanzas of the ballads she had never quite
understood--the ballads they had set her to, in school.

Herself: the milk-white maid, the "maid mild"
Of the ballad. Pursued
By the Dark Villain. Rescued by the Fine Prince.
The Happiness-Ever-After.
That was worth anything.
It was good to be a "maid mild."
That made the breath go fast.

Her bacon burned. She
Hastened to hide it in the step-on can, and
Drew more strips from the meat case. The eggs and sour-milk
biscuits
Did well. She set out a jar
Of her new quince preserve.

. . . But there was something about the matter of the Dark
Villain.
He should have been older, perhaps.
The hacking down of a villain was more fun to think about
When his menace possessed undisputed breath, undisputed
height,
And best of all, when history was cluttered
With the bones of many eaten knights and princesses.

The fun was disturbed, then all but nullified
When the Dark Villain was a blackish child
Of Fourteen, with eyes still too young to be dirty,
And a mouth too young to have lost every reminder
Of its infant softness.

That boy must have been surprised! For
These were grown-ups. Grown-ups were supposed to be wise.
And the Fine Prince--and that other--so tall, so broad, so
Grown! Perhaps the boy had never guessed
That the trouble with grown-ups was that under the magnificent
shell of adulthood, just under,
Waited the baby full of tantrums.
It occurred to her that there may have been something

Ridiculous to the picture of the Fine Prince
Rushing (rich with the breadth and height and
Mature solidness whose lack, in the Dark Villain, was
impressing her,
Confronting her more and more as this first day after the trial
And acquittal (wore on) rushing
With his heavy companion to hack down (unhorsed)
That little foe. So much had happened, she could not
remember now what that foe had done
Against her, or if anything had been done.
The breaks were everywhere. That she could think
Of no thread capable of the necessary
Sew-work.

She made the babies sit in their places at the table.
Then, before calling HIM, she hurried
To the mirror with her comb and lipstick. It was necessary
To be more beautiful than ever.
The beautiful wife.
For sometimes she fancied he looked at her as though
Measuring her. As if he considered, Had she been worth it?
Had she been worth the blood, the cramped cries, the little
stirring bravado, The gradual dulling of those Negro eyes,
The sudden, overwhelming little-boyness in that barn?
Whatever she might feel or half-feel, the lipstick necessity was
something apart. HE must never conclude
That she had not been worth it.

HE sat down, the Fine Prince, and
Began buttering a biscuit. HE looked at HIS hands.
More papers were in from the North, HE mumbled. More
maddening headlines.
With their pepper-words, "bestiality," and "barbarism," and
"Shocking."
The half-sneers HE had mastered for the trial worked across
HIS sweet and pretty face.

What HE'd like to do, HE explained, was kill them all.
The time lost. The unwanted fame.
Still, it had been fun to show those intruders
A thing or two. To show that snappy-eyed mother,
That sassy, Northern, brown-black--

Nothing could stop Mississippi.
HE knew that. Big fella
Knew that.
And, what was so good, Mississippi knew that.
They could send in their petitions, and scar
Their newspapers with bleeding headlines. Their governors
Could appeal to Washington . . .

"What I want," the older baby said, "is 'lasses on my jam."
Whereupon the younger baby

Picked up the molasses pitcher and threw
The molasses in his brother's face. Instantly
The Fine Prince leaned across the table and slapped
The small and smiling criminal.
She did not speak. When the HAND
Came down and away, and she could look at her child,
At her baby-child,
She could think only of blood.
Surely her baby's cheek
Had disappeared, and in its place, surely,
Hung a heaviness, a lengthening red, a red that had no end.
She shook her head. It was not true, of course.
It was not true at all. The
Child's face was as always, the
Color of the paste in her paste-jar.

She left the table, to the tune of the children's lamentations,
which were shriller
Than ever. She
Looked out of a window. She said not a word. That
Was one of the new Somethings--
The fear,
Tying her as with iron.

Suddenly she felt his hands upon her. He had followed her
To the window. The children were whimpering now.
Such bits of tots. And she, their mother,
Could not protect them. She looked at her shoulders, still
Gripped in the claim of his hands. She tried, but could not resist
the idea
That a red ooze was seeping, spreading darkly, thickly, slowly,
Over her white shoulders, her own shoulders,
And over all of Earth and Mars.

He whispered something to her, did the Fine Prince, something
about love and night and intention.
She heard no hoof-beat of the horse and saw no flash of the
shining steel.

He pulled her face around to meet
His, and there it was, close close,
For the first time in all the days and nights.
His mouth, wet and red,
So very, very, very red,
Closed over hers.

Then a sickness heaved within her. The courtroom Coca-Cola,
The courtroom beer and hate and sweat and drone,
Pushed like a wall against her. She wanted to bear it.
But his mouth would not go away and neither would the
Decapitated exclamation points in that Other Woman's eyes.

She did not scream.
She stood there.
But a hatred for him burst into glorious flower,
And its perfume enclasped them--big,
Bigger than all magnolias.

The last bleak news of the ballad.
The rest of the rugged music.
The last quatrain.

Gwendolyn Brooks

Submitted: Thursday, January 01, 2004

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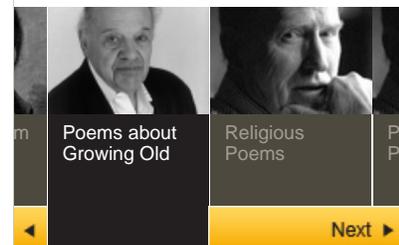
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Mending Wall

BY ROBERT FROST

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,
And spills the upper boulders in the sun;
And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.
The work of hunters is another thing:
I have come after them and made repair
Where they have left not one stone on a stone,
But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,
To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,
No one has seen them made or heard them made,
But at spring mending-time we find them there.
I let my neighbour know beyond the hill;
And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us once again.
We keep the wall between us as we go.
To each the boulders that have fallen to each.
And some are loaves and some so nearly balls
We have to use a spell to make them balance:
"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"
We wear our fingers rough with handling them.
Oh, just another kind of out-door game,
One on a side. It comes to little more:
There where it is we do not need the wall:
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.
My apple trees will never get across
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.
He only says, "Good fences make good neighbours."
Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

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The chilly heart of a whimsical poem

BY AUSTIN ALLEN

If I could put a notion in his head:
"Why do they make good neighbours? Isn't it
Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.
Before I built a wall I'd ask to know
What I was walling in or walling out,
And to whom I was like to give offence.
Something there is that doesn't love a wall,
That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,
But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather
He said it for himself. I see him there
Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top
In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.
He moves in darkness as it seems to me,
Not of woods only and the shade of trees.
He will not go behind his father's saying,
And he likes having thought of it so well
He says again, "Good fences make good neighbours."

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I Wrote A Good Omlette

I wrote a good omelet...and ate
a hot poem... after loving you
Buttoned my car...and drove my
coat home...in the rain...
after loving you
I goed on red...and stopped on
green...floating somewhere in between...
being here and being there...
after loving you
I rolled my bed...turned down
my hair...slightly
confused but...I don't care...
Laid out my teeth...and gargled my
gown...then I stood
...and laid me down...
To sleep...
after loving you

Music Swims Back To Me

Wait Mister. Which way is home?
They turned the light out
and the dark is moving in the corner.
There are no sign posts in this room,
four ladies, over eighty,
in diapers every one of them.
La la la, Oh music swims back to me
and I can feel the tune they played
the night they left me
in this private institution on a hill.

Imagine it. A radio playing
and everyone here was crazy.
I liked it and danced in a circle.
Music pours over the sense
and in a funny way
music sees more than I.
I mean it remembers better;
remembers the first night here.
It was the strangled cold of November;
even the stars were strapped in the sky
and that moon too bright
forking through the bars to stick me
with a singing in the head.
I have forgotten all the rest.

They lock me in this chair at eight a.m.
and there are no signs to tell the way,
just the radio beating to itself
and the song that remembers
more than I. Oh, la la la,
this music swims back to me.
The night I came I danced a circle
and was not afraid.
Mister?

Anne Sexton

The Collected Poems Quotes



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“Eternity bores me,
I never wanted it.

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From the poem "Years", 16 November 1962”

– Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

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“I lean to you, numb as a fossil. Tell me I'm here.”

– Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

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tags: [numbness](#)

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“I?
I walk alone;
The midnight street
Spins itself from under my feet;
My eyes shut
These dreaming houses all snuff out;
Through a whim of mine
Over gables the moon's celestial onion
Hangs high.

like

I
Make houses shrink
And trees diminish
By going far; my look's leash
Dangles the puppet-people
Who, unaware how they dwindle,
Laugh, kiss, get drunk,
Nor guess that if I choose to blink
They die.

I
When in good humour,
Give grass its green
Blazon sky blue, and endow the sun
With gold;
Yet, in my wintriest moods, I hold
Absolute power
To boycott color and forbid any flower
To be.

I
Know you appear
Vivid at my side,
Denying you sprang out of my head,
Claiming you feel
Love fiery enough to prove flesh real,
Though it's quite clear
All your beauty, all your wit, is a gift, my dear,
From me.

“Soliloquy of the Solipsist”, 1956”

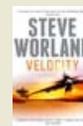
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“What did my fingers do before they held him?
What did my heart do, with its love?”

like

From " Three Women: A Poem for Three Voices", 1962”
– [Sylvia Plath](#), *The Collected Poems*

383 likes

“I am terrified by this dark thing
That sleeps in me;
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity.

like

Clouds pass and disperse.
Are those the faces of love, those pale irretrievables?
Is it for such I agitate my heart?

I am incapable of more knowledge.
What is this, this face
So murderous in its strangle of branches? -

Its snaky acids kiss.
It petrifies the will. These are the isolate, slow faults
That kill, that kill, that kill.

From the poem "Elm", 19 April 1962”
– [Sylvia Plath](#), *The Collected Poems*

319 likes

“I Am Vertical

like

But I would rather be horizontal.
I am not a tree with my root in the soil
Sucking up minerals and motherly love
So that each March I may gleam into leaf,
Nor am I the beauty of a garden bed
Attracting my share of Ahs and spectacularly painted,
Unknowing I must soon unpetal.
Compared with me, a tree is immortal
And a flower-head not tall, but more startling,
And I want the one's longevity and the other's daring.

Tonight, in the infinitesimal light of the stars,
The trees and flowers have been strewing their cool odors.
I walk among them, but none of them are noticing.
Sometimes I think that when I am sleeping
I must most perfectly resemble them--
Thoughts gone dim.
It is more natural to me, lying down.
Then the sky and I are in open conversation,
And I shall be useful when I lie down finally:
The the trees may touch me for once, and the flowers have time for me.

"I Am Vertical", 28 March 1961”
– [Sylvia Plath](#), *The Collected Poems*

tags: [poetry](#), [tree](#)

305 likes

“I am too pure for you or anyone.

like

From the poem "Fever 103°", 20 October 1962”
– [Sylvia Plath](#), *The Collected Poems*

tags: [purity](#)

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“I am terrified by this dark thing that sleeps in me.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: dark, sleep, soul, sylvia-plath

207 likes

“Backward we traveled to reclaim the day

Before we fell, like Icarus, undone;

All we find are altars in decay

And profane words scrawled black across the sun.

like

--From the poem "Doom of the Exiles", written 16 April 1954"

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

163 likes

“I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.

Whatever I see I swallow immediately

Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.

I am not cruel, only truthful-

The eye of the little god, four cornered.

Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.

It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long

I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.

Faces and darkness separate us over and over.

Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,

Searching my reaches for what she really is.

Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.

I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.

She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.

I am important to her. She comes and goes.

Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.

In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman

Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

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“O love, how did you get here?

like

--Nick and the Candlestick”

— Sylvia Plath, *Plath: Poems*

tags: love, poetry

67 likes

“...we shall board our imagined ship and wildly sail among sacred islands of the
mad till death shatters the fabulous stars and makes us real.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

64 likes

“I hurl my heart to halt his pace.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

56 likes

“Elm

like

BY SYLVIA PLATH

I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap root:

It is what you fear.

I do not fear it: I have been there.

Is it the sea you hear in me,

Its dissatisfactions?

Or the voice of nothing, that was your madness?

Love is a shadow.
How you lie and cry after it
Listen: these are its hooves: it has gone off, like a horse.

All night I shall gallop thus, impetuously,
Till your head is a stone, your pillow a little turf,
Echoing, echoing.

Or shall I bring you the sound of poisons?
This is rain now, this big hush.
And this is the fruit of it: tin-white, like arsenic.

I have suffered the atrocity of sunsets.
Scorched to the root
My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires.

Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.
A wind of such violence
Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek.

The moon, also, is merciless: she would drag me
Cruelly, being barren.
Her radiance scathes me. Or perhaps I have caught her.

I let her go. I let her go
Diminished and flat, as after radical surgery.
How your bad dreams possess and endow me.

I am inhabited by a cry.
Nightly it flaps out
Looking, with its hooks, for something to love.

I am terrified by this dark thing
That sleeps in me;
All day I feel its soft, feathery turnings, its malignity.

Clouds pass and disperse.
Are those the faces of love, those pale irretrievables?
Is it for such I agitate my heart?

I am incapable of more knowledge.
What is this, this face
So murderous in its strangle of branches?—

Its snaky acids kiss.
It petrifies the will. These are the isolate, slow faults
That kill, that kill, that kill.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

56 likes

“Ash, ash —
You poke and stir.
Flesh, bone, there is nothing there—

like

A cake of soap,
A wedding ring,
A gold filling.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air.

--From the poem "Lady Lazarus"
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

44 likes

"I know the bottom, she says. I know it with my great tap root:
It is what you fear.
I do not fear it: I have been there.

like

--From the poem "Elm", written 19 April 1962"
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

tags: elm

43 likes

"I dreamed that you bewitched me into bed
And sung me moon-struck, kissed me quite insane.
(I think I made you up inside my head.)"
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: passion, poetry, reality

41 likes

"I didn't want any flowers, I only wanted
To lie with my hands turned up and be utterly empty.
How free it is, you have no idea how free—
The peacefulness is so big it dazes you,
And it asks nothing, a name tag, a few trinkets.
It is what the dead close on, finally; I imagine them
Shutting their mouths on it, like a Communion tablet."
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: death, peace, religion

37 likes

"The night sky is only a sort of carbon paper,
Blueblack, with the much-poked periods of stars
Letting in the light, peephole after peephole---
A bonewhite light, like death, behind all things."
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: death, light, night, poetry, stars

27 likes

"Although, I admit, I desire,
Occasionally, some backtalk
From the mute sky, I can't honestly complain:
A certain minor light may still
Lean incandescent

like

Out of kitchen table or chair
As if a celestial burning took
Possession of the most obtuse objects now and then -- "
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

tags: faith

24 likes

"Perfection is terrible, it cannot have children."
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: elly-kleinman-american

21 likes

"I am made, crudely, for success."
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: the-bell-jar, yoel-goldenberg

18 likes

"Not easy to state the change you made.
If I'm alive now, I was dead,
Though, like a stone, unbothered by it."
— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: [death](#), [depression](#), [sadness](#), [sylvia-plath](#), [the-bell-jar](#)

15 likes

“In this particular tub, two knees jut up
like icebergs, while minute brown hairs rise
on arms and legs in a fringe of kelp; green soap
navigates the tidal slosh of seas
breaking on legendary beaches; in faith
we shall board our imagined ship and wildly sail
among sacred islands of the mad till death
shatters the fabulous stars and makes us real.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

14 likes

“I am your opus.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: [influence](#), [interpersonal](#), [lady-lazarus](#)

14 likes

“I'm collecting my strength; one day I shall manage without her, and she'll perish
with emptiness then, and begin to miss me”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

11 likes

“If you dissect a bird / to diagram the tongue, / you'll cut the chord / articulating
song.”

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

tags: [birds](#), [sylvia-plath](#)

10 likes

“There is more than one good way to drown.”

— Sylvia Plath, *Plath: Poems*

like

10 likes

“Worse even
than your maddening
song, your silence.” -

— Sylvia Plath, *The Collected Poems*

like

9 likes

“Let me sit in a flowerpot,
The spiders won't notice.
My heart is a stopped geranium.”

— Sylvia Plath, *Plath: Poems*

like

8 likes

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