

Emily Dickinson

<p><b>I NEVER saw a moor,</b>          I never saw the sea;          Yet know I how the heather looks,          And what a wave must be.          I never spoke with God,          Nor visited in heaven;          Yet certain am I of the spot          As if the chart were given.</p>	<p><b>I'M nobody!</b> Who are you?          Are you nobody, too?          Then there 's a pair of us—don't tell!          They 'd banish us, you know.            How dreary to be somebody!          How public, like a frog          To tell your name the livelong day          To an admiring bog!</p>	<p><b>MUCH madness is divinest sense</b>          To a discerning eye;          Much sense the starkest madness.          'Tis the majority          In this, as all, prevails.            Assent, and you are sane;          Demur,— you 're straightway dangerous,          And handled with a chain.</p>
<p><b>THE SOUL selects her own society,</b>          Then shuts the door;          On her divine majority          Otrude no more.            Unmoved, she notes the chariot's          pausing          At her low gate;          Unmoved, an emperor is kneeling          Upon her mat.            I 've known her from an ample nation          Choose one;          Then close the valves of her attention          Like stone.</p>	<p><b>I FELT a funeral in my brain,</b>          And mourners, to and fro,          Kept treading, treading, till it seemed          That sense was breaking through.            And when they all were seated,          A service like a drum          Kept beating, beating, till I thought          My mind was going numb.            And then I heard them lift a box,          And creak across my soul          With those same boots of lead, again.          Then space began to toll            As all the heavens were a bell,          And Being but an ear,          And I and silence some strange race,          Wrecked, solitary, here.</p>	<p><b>Success is counted sweetest</b>          By those who ne'er succeed.          To comprehend a nectar          Requires sorest need.            Not one of all the purple host          Who took the flag to-day          Can tell the definition,          So clear, of victory,            As he, defeated, dying,          On whose forbidden ear          The distant strains of triumph          Break, agonized and clear.</p>
<p><b>SURGEONS must be very careful</b>          When they take the knife!          Underneath their fine incisions          Stirs the culprit,—Life</p>	<p><b>FAITH is a fine invention</b>          When gentlemen can see;          But microscopes are prudent          In an emergency!</p>	<p><b>FORBIDDEN fruit a flavor has</b>          That lawful orchards mocks;          How luscious lies the pea within            The pod that Duty locks</p>
<p><b>IS Heaven a physician?</b>          They say that He can heal;          But medicine posthumous          Is unavailable.            Is Heaven an exchequer?          They speak of what we owe;          But that negotiation          I 'm not a party to.</p>	<p><b>"Hope" is the thing with feathers</b>          That perches in the soul          And sings the tune without the words          And never stops at all,            And sweetest in the gale is heard;          And sore must be the storm          That could abash the little bird          That kept so many warm.            I've heard it in the chillest land          And on the strangest sea,          Yet never, in extremity,          It asked a crumb of me.</p>	<p><b>THE BRAIN is wider than the sky,</b>          For, put them side by side,          The one the other will include          With ease, and you beside.            The brain is deeper than the sea,          For, hold them, blue to blue,          The one the other will absorb,          As sponges, buckets do.            The brain is just the weight of God,          For, lift them, pound for pound,          And they will differ, if they do,          As syllable from sound.</p>

## Walt Whitman

### A Noiseless Patient Spider

A NOISELESS, patient spider,  
I mark'd, where, on a little promontory, it stood, isolated;  
Mark'd how, to explore the vacant, vast surrounding,  
It launch'd forth filament, filament, filament, out of itself;  
Ever unreeling them—ever tirelessly speeding them.

And you, O my Soul, where you stand,  
Surrounded, surrounded, in measureless oceans of space,  
Ceaselessly musing, venturing, throwing,—seeking the spheres, to connect them;  
Till the bridge you will need, be form'd—till the ductile anchor hold;  
Till the gossamer thread you fling, catch somewhere, O my Soul.

### The Dark Side

I SIT and look out upon all the sorrows of the world,  
and upon all oppression and shame;  
I hear secret convulsive sobs from young men,  
at anguish with themselves, remorseful after deeds done;  
I see, in low life, the mother misused by her children,  
dying, neglected, gaunt, desperate;  
I see the wife misused by her husband—I see  
the treacherous seducer of young women;  
I mark the ranklings of jealousy and unrequited love,  
attempted to be hid—I see these sights on the earth;  
I see the workings of battle, pestilence, tyranny  
— I see martyrs and prisoners;  
I observe a famine at sea—I observe the sailors casting  
lots who shall be killed, to preserve the lives of the rest;  
I observe the slights and degradations cast by arrogant  
persons upon labourers, the poor, and upon negroes,  
and the like;  
All these—All the meanness and agony without end, I  
sitting, look out upon,  
See, hear, and am silent.

### To a Historian

YOU who celebrate bygoness!  
Who have explored the outward, the surfaces of the races—the life that has  
exhibited itself;  
Who have treated of man as the creature of politics, aggregates, rulers and  
priests;  
I, habitan of the Alleghanies, treating of him as he is in himself, in his own  
rights,  
Pressing the pulse of the life that has seldom exhibited itself,  
(the great pride of man in himself;)  
Chanter of Personality, outlining what is yet to be,  
I project the history of the future.

### When I Heard the Learned Astronomer

When I heard the learn'd astronomer,  
When the proofs, the figures, were ranged in columns before  
me,  
When I was shown the charts and diagrams, to add,  
divide, and measure them,  
When I sitting heard the astronomer where he lectured with  
much applause in the lecture-room,  
How soon unaccountable I became tired and sick,  
Till rising and gliding out I wander'd off by myself,  
In the mystical moist night-air, and from time to time,  
Look'd up in perfect silence at the stars.

## Selected stanzas from *The Song of Myself* (Whitman)

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,  
And what I assume you shall assume,  
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

I loafe and invite my soul,  
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass.

My tongue, every atom of my blood, form'd from this soil, this air,  
Born here of parents born here from parents the same, and their parents the same,  
I, now thirty-seven years old in perfect health begin,  
Hoping to cease not till death.

Creeds and schools in abeyance,  
Retiring back a while sufficed at what they are, but never forgotten,  
I harbor for good or bad, I permit to speak at every hazard,  
Nature without check with original energy.

[...]

Houses and rooms are full of perfumes, the shelves are crowded with perfumes,  
I breathe the fragrance myself and know it and like it,  
The distillation would intoxicate me also, but I shall not let it.  
The atmosphere is not a perfume, it has no taste of the distillation, it is odorless,  
It is for my mouth forever, I am in love with it,  
I will go to the bank by the wood and become undisguised and naked, :  
I am mad for it to be in contact with me.

The smoke of my own breath,  
Echoes, ripples, buzz'd whispers, love-root, silk-thread, crotch and vine  
My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs,  
The sniff of green leaves and dry leaves, and of the shore and dark color'd sea-rocks, and of hay in the barn,  
The sound of the belch'd words of my voice loos'd to the eddies of the wind,  
A few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms,  
The play of shine and shade on the trees as the supple boughs wag,  
The delight alone or in the rush of the streets, or along the fields and hill-sides.  
The feeling of health, the full-noon trill, the song of me rising from bed and meeting the sun.

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the earth much?  
Have you practis'd so long to learn to read?  
Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?  
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,  
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)  
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the  
spectres in books,  
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,  
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

[...]

I have heard what the talkers were talking, the talk of the beginning and the end  
But I do not talk of the beginning or the end.  
There was never any more inception than there is now,  
Nor any more youth or age than there is now,  
And will never be any more perfection than there is now,  
Nor any more heaven or hell than there is now.

Urge and urge and urge,

Always the procreant urge of the world.  
Out of the dimness opposite equals advance, always substance and increase, always sex,  
Always a knit of identity, always distinction, always a breed of life.  
To elaborate is no avail, learn'd and unlearn'd feel that it is so.

Sure as the most certain sure, plumb in the uprights, well entretied, braced in the beams,  
Stout as a horse, affectionate, haughty, electrical,  
I and this mystery here we stand.

Clear and sweet is my soul, and clear and sweet is all that is not my soul.

Lack one lacks both, and the unseen is proved by the seen,  
Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.

Showing the best and dividing it from the worst age vexes age,  
Knowing the perfect fitness and equanimity of things, while they discuss I am silent, and go bathe and admire  
myself.

Welcome is every organ and attribute of me, and of any man hearty and clean,  
Not an inch nor a particle of an inch is vile, and none shall be less familiar than the rest.

I am satisfied--I see, dance, laugh, sing;  
As the hugging and loving bed-fellow sleeps at my side through the night, and withdraws at the peep of the day  
with stealthy tread.  
Leaving me baskets cover'd with white towels swelling the house with their plenty,  
Shall I postpone my acceptance and realization and scream at my eyes,  
That they turn from gazing after and down the road,  
And forthwith cipher and show me to a cent,  
Exactly the value of one and exactly the value of two, and which is ahead?

[...]

Trippers and askers surround me,

People I meet, the effect upon me of my early life or the ward and city I live in, or the nation,  
The latest dates, discoveries, inventions, societies, authors old and new,  
My dinner, dress, associates, looks, compliments, dues,  
The real or fancied indifference of some man or woman I love,  
The sickness of one of my folks or of myself, or ill-doing or loss or lack of money, or depressions or exaltations,  
Battles, the horrors of fratricidal war, the fever of doubtful news, the fitful events;  
These come to me days and nights and go from me again,  
But they are not the Me myself.

Apart from the pulling and hauling stands what I am,  
Stands amused, complacent, compassionating, idle, unitary,  
Looks down, is erect, or bends an arm on an impalpable certain rest,  
Looking with side-curved head curious what will come next,  
Both in and out of the game and watching and wondering at it.

Backward I see in my own days where I sweated through fog with linguists and contenders,  
I have no mockings or arguments, I witness and wait.

[...]

I believe in you my soul, the other I am must not abase itself to you,  
And you must not be abased to the other.

Loafe with me on the grass, loose the stop from your throat,  
Not words, not music or rhyme I want, not custom or lecture, not even the best,  
Only the lull I like, the hum of your valved voice.

I mind how once we lay such a transparent summer morning,  
How you settled your head athwart my hips and gently turn'd over upon me,  
And parted the shirt from my bosom-bone, and plunged your tongue to my bare-stript heart,  
And reach'd till you felt my beard, and reach'd till you held my feet.

Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,  
And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,  
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,  
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women my sisters and lovers,  
And that a kelson of the creation is love,  
And limitless are leaves stiff or drooping in the fields,  
And brown ants in the little wells beneath them,  
And mossy scabs of the worm fenced heap'd stones, elder, mullein and poke-weed.

[...]

A child said What is the grass? fetching it to me with full hands;  
How could I answer the child? I do not know what it is any more than he.

I guess it must be the flag of my disposition, out of hopeful green stuff woven.

Or I guess it is the handkerchief of the Lord,  
A scented gift and remembrancer designedly dropt,  
Bearing the owner's name someway in the corners, that we may see and remark, and say Whose?  
Or I guess the grass is itself a child, the produced babe of the vegetation.

Or I guess it is a uniform hieroglyphic,  
And it means, Sprouting alike in broad zones and narrow zones,  
Growing among black folks as among white,  
Kanuck, Tuckahoe, Congressman, Cuff, I give them the same, I receive them the same.

And now it seems to me the beautiful uncut hair of graves.

Tenderly will I use you curling grass,  
It may be you transpire from the breasts of young men,  
It may be if I had known them I would have loved them.  
It may be you are from old people, or from offspring taken soon out of their mothers' laps,  
And here you are the mothers' laps.

This grass is very dark to be from the white heads of old mothers.  
Darker than the colorless beards of old men,  
Dark to come from under the faint red roofs of mouths.

O I perceive after all so many uttering tongues,  
And I perceive they do not come from the roofs of mouths for nothing.

I wish I could translate the hints about the dead young men and women,  
And the hints about old men and mothers, and the offspring taken soon out of their laps.

What do you think has become of the young and old men?  
And what do you think has become of the women and children?

They are alive and well somewhere,  
The smallest sprout shows there is really no death,  
And if ever there was it led forward life, and does not wait at the end to arrest it,  
And ceas'd the moment life appear'd.

All goes onward and outward, nothing collapses,  
And to die is different from what any one supposed, and luckier.