

*A Letter is a joy of Earth—
It is denied the Gods—*

Emily Dickinson

North Beverly Elementary School
Beverly, Massachusetts
January 12, 2013

Emily E. Dickinson
The Homestead
Main Street
Amherst, Massachusetts



Dear Emily,

Here is a letter for you, all the way from the 21st century!

How can that be? Easy, thanks to Billy and his secret. But I'll get back to all that in a minute. First, let me introduce myself. My name is Jennifer Michaud. I am nine years old and in the fourth grade at North Beverly Elementary.

My class has been reading your poems for homework. After looking up the hard words, we write down the meaning of the poem. We like the way your poems show us things. Sometimes they surprise us. The one on immortality* and eternity† made us think. But we also have some questions. Beth Cummings wants to know what girls did in the 1800s. Jason Climo needs help with a verse.

Ms. Nelson, our teacher, said it was too bad we couldn't talk with you. Of course, she wasn't serious. Then Billy said, "We could! Well, almost."

He knew of a way to send letters into another century! Well, at first no one believed him, but he insisted. Then we figured, why not? Billy is one of the smartest kids in school. (Between you and me, I think it has something to do with his mom. She's a scientist.) Anyway, he said if we promised not to tell anyone, he would do it. Or at least try.

Now for the reason for my letter. Emily, would you like to hear from us? Could you find time to write back? Please say yes! Maybe you would like to receive some of our poems, too. Billy says all you have to do is put your answer back into the carrier and push the green button. I hope you know what he means.

Seems like you'll get this on today's date, but in 1880! Sure hope the machine gets the year right and somebody like George Washington doesn't receive my letter.

Your Beverly friend,
Jennifer Michaud

* immortality: lasting fame
† eternity: endless time

Tuesday eve.

Dear Jennifer!

I should tell the Postmaster to order one Silver Cloud with an emerald eye to hasten overdue Letters! Do you suppose he'll think I'm strange?

Will the young Scientist give me a clue to how his winking evanescence* floated into my conservatory? It was the indignant cry of the Heliotrope† clattering to the floor that announced its celestial‡ arrival.

I wrote to nature once. She didn't reply. Would Billy give her this message?

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me—
The simple News that Nature told—
With tender majesty

Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see—
For love of He—Sweet—countrymen—
Judge tenderly—of Me



To communicate beyond Noon§ into Circumference¶ will be my reward.
I impatiently await the Scientist, the Poets, and the Unknown.

Emily E. Dickinson

* evanescence: the process of vanishing like vapor

† heliotrope: a plant that grows tiny purple flowers

‡ celestial: heavenly

§ noon: Emily uses this word to mean a boundary of time

¶ circumference: here Emily wants this word to suggest unimaginable distance

Thursday morn.

Dear Joanne,

The Silver Cloud gave poor kitty a fright! Her nose wrinkled, her head bobbed and then like a panther she pounced onto the "Sea Chest." Together, we investigated. Chipped goodies were the culprit! Kitty enjoyed a sniff and then settled for a saucer of milk. Vinnie and I, preferring tea, quickly put the kettle on.

God is rather stern with his little ones these shivering February mornings. Like Brooms of Steel the Snow and Wind have swept our winter street.¹⁸

Eternity—that passage into limitless time—your students question. Bravo! Do my friends question if immortality is true? I believe that it is true—the only reality—almost; a thousand times truer than mortality, which is but a semblance* after all...¹⁹

Poems are like roses. We, on the scent of expectation, wait for the words to bloom. Sometimes, we must sniff several times before being satisfied. Paraphrases like Bees can suck the flower dry. I am satisfied with the children's sniffing of "Because I could not stop for Death."

Affectionately,
Emily

P. S. Recipe on the envelope



* semblance: aspect (of immortality)

Black Cake Recipe

½ lb. flour
½ lb. sugar
½ lb. butter
5 eggs
1 lb. raisins
⅔ lb. currants
⅔ lb. citron
⅛ pt. brandy (not Father's best)
⅛ pt. molasses
½ tsp. nutmeg
1 tsp. cloves, mace, and cinnamon
½ tsp. baking soda



Add ½ lb. sugar gradually to ½ lb. soft butter. Blend these until light and creamy. Add 5 eggs unbeaten and ⅛ pt. molasses. Beat this mixture well. Sift before measuring ½ lb. flour. Resift with ½ tsp. baking soda, 1 tsp. cloves, mace, and cinnamon, and ½ tsp. freshly ground nutmeg. If unsalted butter is used, include ½ tsp. salt. Beat these sifted ingredients into the butter and egg mixture alternately with ⅛ pt. brandy. Then stir in 1 lb. raisins, ⅔ lb. currants, and ⅔ lb. citron.

Pour the dough into two loaf pans lined with a layer of heavy waxed paper and bake for 3 to 4 hours in a slow oven at 300 degrees. Place a shallow pan of hot water on the bottom of the oven, but remove it for the last half hour of baking. Let the loaves cool before removing them from pans. Remove the waxed paper, wrap the cakes in fresh waxed paper, and store in tins in a cool place.

Dear Miss Emily,

How are the 1880s back there?

I write poems, too. Here's one:

On Halloween I'll go to town
And wear my trousers upside down,
And wear my shoes turned inside out
And wear a wig of sauerkraut.²⁰

How's that, Emily?

I think I like yours better.

Your North

Beverly Friend,

Sherri Harrison

P.S. Made any goodies lately??

