

## As Imperceptibly as Grief by Emily Dickinson

### The one where summer is ending

This poem is about Emily Dickinson's fear of death and feeling that she is tricked by time passing away. It could also be speaking of how her happiness is disappearing.

#### Key Quotations:

- The title and the first line "As imperceptibly as Grief" links the idea of grief to the passing of summer.
- The tone is melancholic – "Twilight long begun" suggests that grief is overtaking her happiness.
- The images of the end of a day/season such as "dusk", "twilight" and "Summer lapsed away" suggest the passing of time and life.
- Final words – "Summer made her light escape Into the Beautiful" suggests the passage of time is inevitable but will end in something more positive – possibly a release into heaven.
- The tone of the final words is more hopeful than the rest of the poem.

#### Word Definitions:

- ⊙ **Imperceptible** – slight/subtle – hardly noticeable
- ⊙ **Lapsed** – not valid / expired / out of date
- ⊙ **Perfidy** – being deceitful and untrustworthy
- ⊙ **Distilled** – heated to extract something
- ⊙ **Sequestered** – isolated / hidden away
- ⊙ **Courteous** – polite and respectful
- ⊙ **Harrowing** – really distressing

#### Context:

Emily Dickinson was a recluse, lived opposite a graveyard and saw many friends die.

#### Possible Themes and Links

- Time passing – *To Autumn* and *Afternoons*
- The natural world – *To Autumn*, *Excerpt from the Prelude* and *Death of a Naturalist*

The word 'imperceptibly' could suggest that no-one notices the speaker's pain and grief because it has happened so gradually.

The word 'grief' suggests that the pain is unbearable and overwhelming. Grief is seen to be life-changing.

## As Imperceptibly as Grief

The imagery of 'Summer' could represent happiness or the peak time in life.

The verb 'lapsed' could represent that time is passing and the speaker in the poem is thinking that death is approaching.

The use of the image 'Twilight' could suggest that the speaker is trapped between dark/depressed and light/happiness.

As imperceptibly as Grief

The Summer lapsed away—

The word 'Perfidy' may suggest that Dickinson does not trust time and she feels almost tricked by how quickly time/happiness is taken away.

Too imperceptible at last

To seem like Perfidy—

A Quietness distilled

As Twilight long begun,

'Long ago' shows a melancholic tone of the darkness taking over the happiness.

Or Nature spending with herself

Sequestered Afternoon—

The Dusk drew earlier in—

The word 'Dusk' suggests that the speaker feels the darkness is drawing closer and she feels that the light (her happiness) is growing shorter each day.

The Morning foreign shone—

The morning is 'foreign' to her because it offers light and hope. This is something that she does not recognise.

A courteous, yet harrowing Grace,

As Guest, that would be gone—

And thus, without a Wing

Or service of a Keel

'Wing' and 'Keel' could suggest that the speaker feels like she is unstable and trapped. The speaker craves freedom but can't see any escape.

Our Summer made her light escape

The phrase 'harrowing Grace' suggests that everything that should be gentle and kind to her she sees as being painful and frightening.

Into the Beautiful.

Emily Dickinson

The adjective 'light' could suggest that the speaker has finally accepted that time passes and that they will have to face death.

The poem ends positively by Dickinson using the word 'Beautiful'. This could imply that she is now ready to move on to heaven.