

# The Soul has bandaged moments



## POEM TEXT

- 1 The Soul has Bandaged moments —
- 2 When too appalled to stir —
- 3 She feels some ghastly Fright come up
- 4 And stop to look at her —
- 5 Salute her, with long fingers —
- 6 Caress her freezing hair —
- 7 Sip, Goblin, from the very lips
- 8 The Lover — hovered — o'er —
- 9 Unworthy, that a thought so mean
- 10 Accost a Theme — so — fair —
- 11 The soul has moments of escape —
- 12 When bursting all the doors —
- 13 She dances like a Bomb, abroad,
- 14 And swings upon the Hours,
- 15 As do the Bee — delirious borne —
- 16 Long Dungeoned from his Rose —
- 17 Touch Liberty — then know no more —
- 18 But Noon, and Paradise —
- 19 The Soul's retaken moments —
- 20 When, Felon led along,
- 21 With shackles on the plumed feet,
- 22 And staples, in the song,
- 23 The Horror welcomes her, again,
- 24 These, are not brayed of Tongue —

bee, rising up giddily, who has kept apart from his favorite rose for a long time—but then finally touches it, and feels freedom. Then, he only seems to experience midday sunlight and heaven itself.

But the Soul is always recaptured. She is led like a prisoner with manacles on her feathered feet, and restrictions on her song. The Fear welcomes her back once more—and these moments are so awful they can't even be screamed about.



## THEMES



### THE POWER OF EMOTION

According to Dickinson's "The Soul has Bandaged moments," life is a rough ride of ups and downs—and, for this speaker, more downs than ups. The poem implies that to be a person is to suffer these inevitable extremes and to sometimes feel completely at the mercy of overwhelming emotions. What makes it even worse is the fact that the good times, for the speaker at least, are tainted by the knowledge that the old fears will return before too long.

The speaker uses terrifying [imagery](#) to evoke the experience of despair, anxiety, or any number of unpleasant emotions that can seem to “come up” involuntarily. The speaker presents the soul as a female figure who “has Bandaged moments,” a phrase that suggests that the soul is sometimes wounded by the world and needs time to recover. Yet while those bandages can be *healing*, they also *constrict* this [personified](#) soul: in these “moments,” the speaker says, the soul is too horrified to “stir,” or move, when “some ghastly Fright” comes to stare “at her.” This image of an immobilized soul coming face to face with a “Fright” might evoke how it feels like to be overtaken by despair.

Such awful feelings hover over the “Soul,” the speaker continues, like a “Goblin” that strokes “her freezing hair” and takes a “Sip” from her “very lips.” Now, the soul seems like a helpless figure, while despair has turned into a kind of lascivious suitor whose advances the soul is unable to fend off. Despair, here, turns from a restriction to a violation. And it seems unfair, says the speaker, that something as beautiful (“fair”) as the soul should have to suffer in this way. (At the same time, the fact that the speaker talks about despair in the same breath as a “Lover” might suggest that there’s something a little seductive about these feelings that the speaker can’t control.)

But the soul doesn’t *always* suffer like this; she has “moments” in which she feels happy and free. When feeling good, the soul is a force unleashed, “bursting all the doors”—that is, brushing aside all the obstacles in her path (or perhaps breaking free



## SUMMARY

The soul has times in which she seems to be covered up in bandages. At these times, too afraid to move, she senses some hideous Fear coming to stare at her.

The Fear greets the Soul with its long fingers and strokes her frozen hair. It drinks like a goblin from the same lips that the Soul’s lover once floated above. It’s unfair that such a horrible thought should violate something as lovely as the Soul.

But the Soul also has times when she escapes. She breaks down all barriers and dances a wild, explosive dance, moving as if time itself were a swing for her to play on. She behaves just like the

from the constriction of those "bandages"). She dances "like a bomb"—powerful, noisy, and even a little dangerous.

These are the moments in which the soul "touch[es] liberty"—that is, when she knows and possesses true freedom (from "Fright[s]" and the like). The poem compares this sense of freedom to the feelings of a bee blissfully reunited with a rose. Life, then, sometimes reveals "Paradise" to the Soul—but that paradise can't last.

Despite the wild and overwhelming joy of these "moments of escape," the soul knows that she can't prevent—or predict—the "Fright[s]" retaking her. Like an escaped and recaptured prisoner, the soul experiences a freedom as brief as it is glorious. In fact, this "Horror" is lying in wait to "welcome" the soul again—an inevitability so awful that it can't even be "brayed of tongue" (that is, screamed about).

There is, then, a kind of cycle of despair at work with brief interludes of something brighter. And the soul doesn't have much control over this cycle: she's at the mercy of her emotional world, and the joyous "escape" from pain is sadly never permanent.

#### Where this theme appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24



## LINE-BY-LINE ANALYSIS

### LINES 1-4

*The Soul has Bandaged moments —  
When too appalled to stir —  
She feels some ghastly Fright come up  
And stop to look at her —*

In the first lines of this poem, the "Soul" is [personified](#) as a female figure, setting up an exploration of what it means to live as a thinking and feeling human being—and in particular, what it's like to live at the mercy of one's own emotions.

The poem begins (and ends) with suffering. At the outset, the speaker reflects on times when this Soul feels as if she's wrapped in bandages, like an Egyptian mummy. This image suggests a kind of distance—a deadness—that prevents the Soul from affecting her own situation. The bandages perhaps protect the Soul or cover some wound, but they are also restrictive.

During these "Bandaged moments," the Soul is so terrified of the "ghastly Fright" (also personified) that comes to gawk at her that she can't move or make a sound ("stir"). This monstrous figure seems to paralyze the Soul with terror.

Notice how [consonance](#) and [alliteration](#) bring this frightening encounter to life on the page:

She feels some ghastly Fright come up  
And stop to look at her —

[Sibilant](#), whispery /s/ sounds conjure a ghostly atmosphere, while the two /f/ sounds link the feeling of being afraid with the "Fright" causing that fear. The /t/ sounds are ugly and spiky to match the image of a terrifying, unwanted visitation. And Dickinson's characteristic dashed [end-stops](#) at lines 1, 2, and 4 give the stanza a suspenseful, horror-movie atmosphere.

### LINES 5-10

*Salute her, with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —  
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips  
The Lover — hovered — o'er —  
Unworthy, that a thought so mean  
Accost a Theme — so — fair —*

The second stanza is like an image from a nightmare. Here, the poem develops the character of the "ghastly Fright" who assails the Soul, portraying it as a creepy, lecherous "Goblin." This nasty piece of work [personifies](#) a state of intense fear and anxiety.

The "Goblin" cheerily "salute[s]" the Soul, as if mocking her inability to move. Its long fingers "caress her freezing hair," which seems to embody her frozen terror—and evokes the shivery feeling of hair standing on end. Creepier still, this "Fright" "sip[s]" from the Soul's lips—the same ones that her "Lover" once "hovered" over in happier times. In other words, the kind of terror these lines describe feels as awful and demeaning as a sexual assault.

One of the most striking things about this stanza is its pace. The "Goblin" takes its sweet time to go about its seedy business. Look at how the [caesurae](#) and [end-stops](#) in lines 5-8 make this section agonizingly, terrifyingly slow:

Salute her, || with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —  
Sip, || Goblin, || from the very lips  
The Lover — || hovered — o'er —

It's as if the Fright savors every moment of terrorizing the poor, defenseless Soul.

Sound effects also capture the Goblin's relish for cruelty. [Sibilance](#) in "Salute," "Caress," "Sip," and "Lips" sends a whispery chill through the stanza, while the /o/ [assonance](#) in "Lover — hovered —" seems to make the line linger for a sinister extra moment.

In lines 9 and 10, the speaker does something a little unusual. So far, the poem has been written in one of Dickinson's favorite forms: the ballad, a four-line stanza that often alternates between lines of [iambic](#) tetrameter and iambic trimeter:

- An iamb is a poetic foot made of two syllables in an unstressed-**stressed** pattern: da-DUM.
- Tetrameter means there are four iambs per line, while trimeter means there are three.

But here, the speaker adds an extra two lines in order to remark on the soul's predicament—lines that thus feel like an aside, a commentary on the four lines that came before.

It seems unfair, the speaker says in these lines, that something as lovely, delicate, and unique as the human soul—in short, something so "fair"—should have to suffer such a "mean," degrading experience. The speaker refers to the Goblin as a "thought," suggesting that the poem is, in part at least, about the terrible tricks that the mind can play on itself.

In other words, the Goblin is the manifestation of a terror that comes from inside—but that feels as if it has its own independent (and malevolent) desires and intentions. That suggests that the human soul sometimes seems to be completely at the mercy of frightening, overwhelming feeling.

#### LINES 11-14

*The soul has moments of escape —  
When bursting all the doors —  
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,  
And swings upon the Hours,*

In stanza 3, everything suddenly changes. While stanzas 1 and 2 focus on the [personified](#) Soul's difficult times—her "bandaged moments" in the unwanted company of "Fright"—the third and fourth stanzas discuss "moments of escape," times of blissful liberty from that "Goblin."

The first line of this stanza uses [parallelism](#) and [anaphora](#) to echo the very first line of the poem, underlining the [juxtaposition](#) between two different experiences. It's like a (poetic) line drawn in the sand, dividing *those* moments from *these* ones.

These, then, are "moments" in which the soul "escape[s]" like a prisoner and "burst[s] all the doors" (and bandages too). This [metaphor](#) conjures emotional release—joy, even—but also a kind of violent wildness. Though these "moments" are probably far preferable to those described in the first stanza, they don't exactly depict the Soul as in control of her situation. Again, the Soul seems to be at the mercy of her own feelings.

Listen to the [alliterative](#) /b/ sounds in these lines:

[...] bursting all the doors —  
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,  
And swings upon the Hours,

These sounds have an explosive quality that fits with the [simile](#) "like a Bomb." Readers might well ask whether a bomb is really a good model for freedom! To dance like a bomb suggests

passion and abandon, but also danger—as though something, perhaps the soul itself, might get destroyed in the process. Furthermore, these moments take place "abroad"—that is, away from the soul's usual home. This highlights that the good times are, sadly, few and far between.

But, in those moments when it's happy, the Soul "swings upon the Hours," as if there will be no end to these good feelings.

#### LINES 15-18

*As do the Bee — delirious borne —  
Long Dungeoned from his Rose —  
Touch Liberty — then know no more —  
But Noon, and Paradise —*

The fourth stanza continues to describe "moments of escape" (as opposed to the moments spent with horrible "Goblin[s]"). Here, the poem offers an [analogy](#), comparing the brief freedom of the soul to a Bee visiting its beloved Rose:

*As do the Bee — delirious borne —  
Long Dungeoned from his Rose —  
Touch Liberty — then know no more —  
But Noon, and Paradise —*

These complicated lines might be paraphrased like this: bees experience pure, "delirious" joy when they at last get to drink from a precious "Rose" from which they've been "Long Dungeoned"—that is, separated. Reunited with that "Rose," they feel utterly free, as if they're embracing "Liberty," the brilliant sunlight of "Noon," and "Paradise" itself.

In other words: in its moments of "escape," the Soul feels as drunk on joy as a bee is drunk on fragrant rose nectar. But that joy is also a kind of oblivion. The bee "knows no more" than its "Liberty" and delight. And that exuberant shortsightedness, the poem will go on to suggest, is dangerous: it might make the Soul *feel* as if it's going to live in "Paradise" forever, but that's just not how emotion works.

#### LINES 19-24

*The Soul's retaken moments —  
When, Felon led along,  
With shackles on the plumed feet,  
And staples, in the song,  
The Horror welcomes her, again,  
These, are not brayed of Tongue —*

The final lines of the poem describe what happens when the Soul's happier "moments" of escape end, as they must, and the Soul is "retaken"—that is, captured by monstrous "Fright" once again. Like an escaped "Felon," the Soul is led right back to her terrible, frozen, "bandaged" confinement.

Here, the poem uses [metaphor](#) to make this imprisonment feel even more tragic. The Soul has "plumed feet" (that is, her feet are winged like [Mercury's](#)) and a "song," implying that she's

meant to be free as a bird. But those feet are trapped by "shackles," and her "song" is cruelly punctured and restricted by "staples." The Soul, then, was *born* to fly and sing—which makes her defeat and imprisonment feel all the more poignant.

And, of course, who should be waiting for the recaptured soul but that same "Fright" that traumatized her at the start? Here, it is described as "The Horror." Perhaps the worst part of that "Horror" is the certainty that, no matter how much the soul might believe her moments of "Liberty" will last forever, misery always returns in the end. And once more, the "Horror" seems to take a creepy pleasure in tormenting the Soul, "welcom[ing] her" with a sinister grin.

The Soul seems frozen with terror in these final lines, just as she was in the "bandaged moments" at the beginning of the poem. These "retaken moments," the poem concludes, are "not brayed of tongue": the Soul can't even cry out to protest her recapture.

The painful circularity of these experiences suggests that the Soul is completely at the mercy of emotions that are stronger than her.



## POETIC DEVICES

### ALLITERATION

[Alliteration](#) brings the poem's [metaphors](#) and images to life on the page, helping to conjure an eerie atmosphere.

Take, for example, the sinister episode in which the bandaged soul is accosted and fondled by "some ghastly Fright"—a soul-deep terror. The Soul is a delicate creature, and the "Goblin" that caresses her takes grotesque enjoyment in her suffering. Alliteration captures both the soul's fear *and* the Goblin's pleasure:

She feels some ghastly Fright come up  
And stop to look at her —  
Salute her, with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —  
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips  
The Lover — hovered — o'er —

The emphatic /f/ sounds in lines 3-6 draw attention to the "Fright" and its awful touch; the alliterative /h/ in line 6, meanwhile, suggests the Soul's shallow, frightened breathing. The /l/ sound has a lip-smacking quality that fits with the /p/ consonance in "Sip" and "lips," making it sound as if the Goblin is savoring every moment.

But the Soul doesn't *only* suffer. It also enjoys "moments of escape." These joyous, wild times are like an explosion, evoked by the alliterating /b/ sounds in stanzas 3 and 4:

The soul has moments of escape —  
When bursting all the doors —  
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,  
And swings upon the Hours,  
As do the Bee — delirious borne —

These plosive /b/ sounds are like little bursts of color and light, embodying the soul's unleashed happiness during her all-too-brief moments of release.

Before too long, though, the Soul is "retaken" by the same frightful "Horror" that accosted it in the first part of the poem. In the last two stanzas, the /s/ alliteration in "staples" and "song" recalls the [sibilant consonance](#) of the second stanza, creating an unsettling whispery hush that matches the Soul's own helpless silence. And the alliterative "Horror" and "her" in line 23 bring back that frightened gasping sound.

#### Where Alliteration appears in the poem:

- **Line 3:** "feels," "Fright"
- **Line 5:** "fingers"
- **Line 6:** "her," "freezing," "hair"
- **Line 7:** "lips"
- **Line 8:** "Lover"
- **Line 9:** "thought"
- **Line 10:** "Theme"
- **Line 12:** "bursting," "doors"
- **Line 13:** "dances," "Bomb," "abroad"
- **Line 15:** "Bee," "borne"
- **Line 22:** "staples," "song"
- **Line 23:** "Horror," "her"

### ANALOGY

The poem uses [analogy](#) in the fourth stanza while describing the soul's "moments of escape." The Soul's unbridled—and rather wild—joy in such moments is compared with the experience of a bee:

As do the Bee — delirious borne —  
Long Dungeoned from his Rose —  
Touch Liberty — then know no more —  
But Noon, and Paradise —

This stanza describes how a bee rises joyously from a rose, drunk on nectar, after being "Dungeoned" (that is, separated) from that rose for too long. This blissful reunion affords the bee a brief glimpse of "Paradise"—a kind of eternal sunlit "Noon" that the bee imagines will last forever. For just a moment, it "know[s] no more" than this full-body delight.

That's just how the Soul feels when she escapes the "Goblin" of fear, the poem suggests. But for both the bee and the Soul, this moment of overpowering delight is tragically short-lived. The

sun won't stay high forever just because the bee doesn't know that "Noon" isn't eternal—and the Soul can't stay wild and free forever, even if her moments of delight feel like a complete "escape" from all the painful feelings that plagued her before.

#### Where Analogy appears in the poem:

- **Lines 15-18:** "As do the Bee — delirious borne — / Long Dungeoned from his Rose — / Touch Liberty — then know no more — / But Noon, and Paradise —"

## ASSONANCE

[Assonance](#) works with [alliteration](#) and [consonance](#) to dramatize the different emotions that afflict the soul, bringing them to vivid life on the page. It's most notable in the creepy second stanza, which describes how "Fright"—in the form of a "Goblin"—accosts the helpless soul:

Sip, Goblin, from the very lips  
The Lover — hovered — o'er —

The assonance here underlines the images of grotesque seduction here. The clipped /ih/ sound in "Sip," "Goblin," and "lips" is unsettlingly delicate, while the /uh/ and /er/ sounds in "Lover" and "hovered" help create an [internal rhyme](#), slowing the poem's pace down and mirroring that "hover[ing]."

#### Where Assonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 7:** "Sip, Goblin,," "lips"
- **Line 8:** "Lover," "hovered"
- **Line 9:** "mean"
- **Line 10:** "Theme"
- **Line 13:** "Bomb," "abroad"
- **Line 17:** "know no"
- **Line 20:** "When, Felon led"

## CAESURA

[Caesurae](#) are a key part of this poem, as they tend to be in any poem by Emily Dickinson! They come in the form of commas and the characteristic Dickinsonian em-dash and generally slow the poem's pace.

This is most noticeable in the second stanza, during which the Soul has to endure the unwanted attention of a "Goblin" (the [personified](#) representation of some deep terror, anxiety, or pain). Just look at how commas and dashes make the Goblin seem lingering and lecherous:

Salute her, || with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —  
Sip, || Goblin, || from the very lips  
The Lover — || hovered — || o'er —  
Unworthy, || that a thought so mean

Accost a Theme — || so — || fair —

These many, many caesurae here mean the stanza takes an age to unfold. It's as if this Goblin of painful emotion is fully aware of its power over the Soul and takes its time to torment her. [End-stops](#) help make that effect even more pronounced.

Caesura can also suggest the fleeting presence of a more positive emotion. In line 17, the poem describes how a bee (and, by [analogy](#), the soul) can briefly:

Touch Liberty — || then know no more—  
But Noon, || and Paradise

These mid-line breaks evoke a bee hovering in midair, full of heavenly rose-nectar.

#### Where Caesura appears in the poem:

- **Line 5:** "her, with"
- **Line 7:** "Sip, Goblin, from"
- **Line 8:** "Lover — hovered — o'er"
- **Line 9:** "Unworthy, that"
- **Line 10:** "Theme — so — fair"
- **Line 13:** "Bomb, abroad"
- **Line 15:** "Bee — delirious"
- **Line 17:** "Liberty — then"
- **Line 18:** "Noon, and"
- **Line 20:** "When, Felon"
- **Line 22:** "staples, in"
- **Line 23:** "her, again,"
- **Line 24:** "These, are"

## CONSONANCE

[Consonance](#) works with other sound patterning like [alliteration](#) and [assonance](#) to create a tense atmosphere of fear and horror.

For instance, check out the [sibilant](#) consonance in the second stanza, which sends a chill through its six lines (and, perhaps, the reader's soul!):

Salute her, with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —  
Sip, Goblin, from the very lips

Try saying this out loud and notice how these sounds create an unsettling, Gollum-like whispery tone—evoking this "Goblin[']s" creepy lecherousness.

#### Where Consonance appears in the poem:

- **Line 2:** "too," "to stir"
- **Line 3:** "feels some ghastly Fright"
- **Line 4:** "stop to," "at"

- **Line 5:** "Salute," "long fingers"
- **Line 6:** "Caress," "her," "hair"
- **Line 7:** "Sip," "lips"
- **Line 8:** "Lover — hovered"
- **Line 9:** "Unworthy, that," "thought"
- **Line 10:** "Theme"
- **Line 11:** "soul," "moments," "escape"
- **Line 12:** "bursting"
- **Line 13:** "Bomb," "abroad,"
- **Line 15:** "do," "Bee," "delirious borne"
- **Line 16:** "Long Dungeoned"
- **Line 17:** "know no"
- **Line 18:** "Noon"
- **Line 19:** "retaken moments"
- **Line 20:** "Felon led along"
- **Line 21:** "shackles," "plumed"
- **Line 22:** "staples," "song"
- **Line 23:** "Horror," "her"

## END-STOPPED LINE

The poem's [end-stops](#)—many of them characteristic Dickinson em-dashes—control (and disrupt) the poem's flow. These dashes also make the poem feel fragmented, which mirrors the soul's experience as it lurches from "Bandaged moments" to "moments of escape" and back again.

Take the second stanza, for example:

Salute her, with long **fingers** —  
 Caress her freezing **hair** —  
 Sip, Goblin, from the very lips  
 The Lover — hovered — **o'er** —

End-stops here (together with [caesurae](#)) slow the poem to a near crawl. This means the reader has to spend more reading time in the company of this horrible, lecherous "Goblin," observing as the creature runs its long fingers over the Soul's hair and "sips" from her lips. Try reading this out *without* the end-stops to notice just how powerfully they affect the poem: these pauses draw this agonizing scene out to almost unbearable lengths.

End-stops can also suggest brevity, as in the fourth stanza:

As do the Bee — delirious **borne** —  
 Long Dungeoned from his **Rose** —  
 Touch Liberty — then know no **more** —  
 But Noon, and **Paradise** —

The soul, like a bee drunk on nectar, sometimes knows "Paradise" for a brief moment. End-stops here feel like bursting bubbles, suggesting that these good times are fleeting and precious.

## Where End-Stopped Line appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "moments —"
- **Line 2:** "stir —"
- **Line 4:** "her —"
- **Line 5:** "fingers —"
- **Line 6:** "hair —"
- **Line 8:** "o'er —"
- **Line 10:** "fair —"
- **Line 11:** "escape —"
- **Line 12:** "doors —"
- **Line 15:** "borne —"
- **Line 16:** "Rose —"
- **Line 17:** "more —"
- **Line 18:** "Paradise —"
- **Line 19:** "moments —"
- **Line 24:** "Tongue —"

## METAPHOR

In truth, the whole poem is [metaphorical](#), built around the idea of a Soul [personified](#) as a woman. (See the separate section on Personification for more on that.) The poem's other metaphors (and single [simile](#)) are like add-ons or boosters to this central imaginative leap.

Metaphor's main role here is to transform the nasty "thought[s]" that "accost" the Soul into terrifying supernatural creatures. These metaphors—which are themselves a kind of personification—portray painful or frightening feelings as external forces with their own malevolent desires and schemes. "Fright," for example, is a lecherous "Goblin," caressing the terrified Soul with its creepy "long fingers" and "sip[ping]" from her lips without invitation. This metaphor presents emotion, not as something the soul *has* or *does*, but as something that assaults the Soul from the outside—something the Soul has to put up with and can do little to retaliate against.

The poem also uses the recurring metaphor of imprisonment to suggest just how trapped the Soul feels by "Fright." While she might "escape" her "Horror" for a while, she always finds her freedom-loving "plumed feet" (itself a metaphor, making the soul like a winged creature) "shackle[d]" again. This metaphor suggests that fluctuations of emotion might be normal, but they never *feel* that way: every return to "Horror" feels like a fresh "Dungeon[ing]."

## Where Metaphor appears in the poem:

- Line 1
- Line 3
- Lines 5-10
- Line 14
- Line 15
- Lines 16-18

- Lines 21-22
- Line 23

## PERSONIFICATION

[Personification](#) is a vital part of this poem, and casts the Soul as a female figure. By giving the Soul a physical presence, the poem makes an abstract idea into a sympathetic character.

The personified Soul comes across as an almost powerless figure, completely at the mercy of emotion. Bad thoughts "accost" her like ghosts and goblins, and she feels frozen, unable to fight back. Personification highlights just how little agency the Soul has in what happens to her.

Sometimes the personified soul is able to escape her confines and enjoy "moments of escape." Here, she is like a force unleashed, "busting all the doors" and dancing "like a Bomb," with a kind of frenzied joy. But even here she doesn't seem to be in control: she's just under the power of a different emotion.

And soon enough, the Soul gets recaptured. Personification allows the poem to present her as a "Felon," an escaped criminal brought back under the power of the same "Horror" that haunted her at the beginning of the poem.

All in all, then, this device presents the Soul as a victim, ever at the mercy of her feelings—and suggests, by extension, that perhaps people in general don't have a lot of control over their own emotions!

### Where Personification appears in the poem:

- Lines 1-24

## REPETITION

This poem works like a tragedy in three acts, and the speaker uses [repetition](#) to divide up the narrative.

The poem begins with a focus on "Bandaged moments." These are bad times in which the Soul suffers unwanted attention from "ghastly Fright[s]," and, trapped in layers of bandages like a mummy, is unable to resist. This "act" is introduced by the first line:

The Soul has Bandaged moments —

Then, in line 11, a similar phrasing appears:

The soul has moments of escape —

This moment of [anaphora](#) clearly marks the shift from bad times to better times. By using the same sentence structure, the speaker sets up a [juxtaposition](#) between the Soul's helpless terror and its equally involuntary joy.

Alas, when that anaphora recurs again, the Soul is right back

where she started:

The Soul's retaken moments —

The Soul is recaptured and welcomed by "The Horror" once more. Here, anaphora creates an atmosphere of weary inevitability—as though it the brief joys of "escape" could never become permanent.

Elsewhere, the poem also uses [parallelism](#):

She feels some ghastly Fright come up  
And stop to look at her —  
Salute her, with long fingers —  
Caress her freezing hair —

These constructions portray the Soul as a kind of passive object, powerless in the much more active hands of this terrible "Goblin."

### Where Repetition appears in the poem:

- **Line 1:** "The Soul has Bandaged moments —"
- **Line 4:** "to look at her"
- **Line 5:** "Salute her"
- **Line 6:** "Caress her"
- **Line 11:** "The soul has moments of escape —"
- **Line 19:** "The Soul's retaken moments —"

## SIMILE

The poem uses only one [simile](#), which is itself folded into a bundle of [metaphor](#) and [personification](#). This simile describes the Soul's "moments of escape," as opposed to the "Bandaged moments" in which she is accosted by frightening thoughts:

The soul has moments of escape —  
When bursting all the doors —  
She dances like a Bomb, abroad,

These snatched "moments of escape," this simile suggests, feel like wild explosions of joy and freedom. It's as if the Soul is suddenly high on life, bursting through all the barriers that normally hold her back. Freed from the touch of the horrible "Goblin" of fear and anxiety, the Soul doesn't just move, but "dances," an expression of spontaneous happiness. She becomes a powerful, confident figure. But her freedom isn't totally free: the Soul is still governed by the force of her emotions, at the mercy of her mood swings.

And of course, there's danger as well as delight in this simile. Bombs, after all, are violent things, liable to blow up at any moment. Perhaps the wild swing from imprisonment to escape is in itself an uncontrollable (and uncomfortable) pattern in which the Soul is caught.

Where Simile appears in the poem:



## VOCABULARY

**Stir** (Line 2) - Move, especially to take action.

**Ghastly Fright** (Line 3) - Some hideous terror—for instance, a ghost or a monster.

**Goblin** (Line 7) - A small and grotesque supernatural creature.

**O'er** (Line 8) - Abbreviation of "over."

**Unworthy** (Line 9) - Unfair.

**Mean** (Line 9) - Here, "mean" doesn't mean "cruel," but "lowly" or "debased."

**Accost** (Line 10) - Harass, with connotations of "grab, impede."

**Abroad** (Line 13) - Far and wide (and away from home).

**Hours** (Line 14) - Time.

**Dungeoned** (Line 16) - Kept imprisoned/apart from.

**Liberty** (Line 17) - Freedom.

**Felon** (Line 20) - A convict, a criminal.

**Shackles** (Line 21) - Manacles—chains for the ankles.

**Plumed** (Line 21) - Feathered.

**Staples** (Line 22) - Metal fasteners.

**Horror** (Line 23) - The same or a similar "Fright[ening]" thought as earlier.

**These, are not brayed of Tongue** (Line 24) - That is, "no tongue can tell how awful these moments are."



## FORM, METER, & RHYME

### FORM

"The Soul has bandaged moments" is mostly written using [quatrain](#)s (except for the second and last stanzas). This is a pretty typical stanza form for a Dickinson poem. These are more specifically [ballad](#) stanzas, meaning they alternate between lines of tetrameter and trimeter (more on that in the Meter section of this guide) and follow an ABCB [rhyme scheme](#).

What's most notable, then, is how the second and last stanzas deviate from the norm—and why.

The second stanza describes how the Soul is "Accost[ed]" by a "ghastly" Goblin, which is the manifestation of some "mean" thought—that is, some kind of painful emotion. This Goblin takes its time as it caresses the Soul with its creepy "long fingers" and "Sip[s]" from her lips. In other words, it's enjoying itself, savoring every moment. Accordingly, this stanza takes

longer to unfold, using six lines rather than the typical four. This type of stanza is known as a [sestet](#), and makes the Soul's—and the reader's—experience with this Goblin feel painfully drawn out.

The final stanza, meanwhile, is only two lines long—a [couplet](#)—and makes for a dramatic finish. The stanza break between lines 22 and 23 makes the return of the "Horror"—a.k.a. the "Fright"/the Goblin—even more sudden and terrifying.

### METER

For the most part, "The Soul has bandaged moments" loosely uses Dickinson's usual [ballad](#) meter (a term sometimes used interchangeably with [common meter](#)). This meter uses [quatrain](#)s with alternating lines of [iambic](#) tetrameter and trimeter—that is, lines of either four or three iambs, metrical feet with a da-DUM rhythm.

That rhythm is clearest in the third stanza:

The soul | has mom-| ents of | escape —  
When burst- | ing all | the doors —  
She dan- | ces like | a Bomb, | abroad,  
And swings | upon | the Hours,

But the poem often deviates from this steady meter for effect. Take the extra stress at the start of line 7, for example: "Sip, Goblin, from the **very** lips[.]" This makes the verb, "sip," more prominent—and thus more gruesome.

### RHYME SCHEME

"The Soul has Bandaged moments" uses the same steady [rhyme scheme](#) that appears in much of Dickinson's poetry. It runs like this:

ABCB

Both the longer second stanza and the short closing stanza just add another two lines with the same pattern. For example, the closing stanza picks up on the rhyme scheme of the [quatrain](#) before it, adding a final DB to the above pattern. Here's stanza 2, for example:

ABCBDB

Most of these rhymes are [slant rhymes](#), just a little off—a fairly typical Dickinson technique. That means that a few perfect rhymes—"stir" and "her," "hair" and "fair," "along" and "song"—really stand out. Take a look at these lines to see the effects:

The Soul's retaken moments —  
When, Felon led **along**,  
With shackles on the plumed feet,~  
And staples, in the **song**,



The sudden tightness of the rhyme here creates a sense of inevitability, reflecting the way the good times lead—tragically—back to the bad.



## SPEAKER

The unidentified speaker of "The Soul has bandaged moments" never speaks in the first person. That might, at first, make the poem seem like a relatively objective account of the life of the [personified](#) Soul, describing how she veers from bad times to good and back again, at the mercy of wild emotions.

That said, it's hard to separate a "Soul" from a person! So perhaps some of the Soul's experiences in this poem are informed by the speaker's life. The "Fright[s]," "Goblins," and "Horror[s]" that accost the unfortunate Soul—and her moments of exuberant "escape"—could very well be read as expressions of the speaker's own experiences.



## SETTING

The poem takes place entirely in the speaker's imagination. Here, the Soul, [personified](#) as a woman, is at the mercy of extreme emotions that accost her like lecherous "Goblin[s]." The poem's use of tropes from Gothic horror—that Goblin, the "ghastly Fright" of line 3, the "Horror" of line 23—suggest that the speaker's own inner life might often feel rather like a grotesque nightmare.

But the poem also investigates the Soul's moments of "escape" from all those torments, using a giddy, rose-drunk "Bee" as an image of freedom and joy—a common idea for Dickinson, who often used insects to explore [similar feelings](#).



## CONTEXT

### LITERARY CONTEXT

Though she was hardly read during her lifetime, Emily Dickinson is now considered one of the foremost poets in the English language. She was born in Amherst, Massachusetts in 1830 and lived there until her death in 1886. She published little during her lifetime and was famously reclusive; it wasn't until after she died that her sister Lavinia discovered a trunk full of nearly 1,800 poems hidden in her bedroom. Some of those poems—like this one—didn't see print until as late as 1945.

Many of Dickinson's poems explore abstract and difficult terrain, from the nature of the soul to death itself. Her poetry often approaches these thorny subjects through vivid, surprising, and unsettling images and metaphors—for example, a "mean" thought" as a kind of monster, or [Death as a coachman](#).

This is only one of Dickinson's many poems that explores the nature of the soul—though, understandably, these are some of her most mysterious and ambiguous works. Like this poem, "[The Soul selects her own Society](#)" [personifies](#) the Soul as a woman; however, that poem's version of the Soul seems more empowered and in control. Readers might also want to check out "[The Soul's superior instants](#)" and "[The Soul should always stand ajar](#)."

This poem also shows the influence of [Gothic literature](#), of which Dickinson was a fan. "The Soul has Bandaged moments" features elements typical of Gothic horror: goblins, ghouls, and the frightened Soul itself.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

This poem was written around 1862, during Dickinson's most prolific period of writing. It was thus created against the backdrop of the American Civil War, though there is no evidence of that in the text itself. Dickinson's poetry rarely comments directly on her own historical time, which perhaps partly explains why her work feels timeless.

In this poem, for instance, her focus on the Soul's experience touches on ancient questions about the inner life—emotions, thoughts, feelings. Indeed, the poem's contrast between a placid surface appearance—like the Soul wrapped up in bandages—and a turbulent inner life maps pretty neatly onto Dickinson's own story. Dickinson spent most of her time upstairs writing some of the finest poetry in the language—and barely a soul outside knew this was happening.

Dickinson grew up in a highly religious Christian atmosphere, with a strict and Puritanical father. Interestingly, Puritan theology often depicts the Soul as feminine. But Dickinson's Soul, in this poem, seems like something more personal and private, as though it is beholden to no external religious laws.



## MORE RESOURCES

### EXTERNAL RESOURCES

- [Dickinson's Meter](#) — Learn more about the poet's use of meter (and particularly how it relates to hymns). (<https://poemshape.wordpress.com/2009/01/18/emily-dickinson-iambic-meter-and-rhyme/>)
- [The Emily Dickinson Museum](#) — Visit the Emily Dickinson Museum's website to learn more about her life, and her poetry. (<https://www.emilydickinsonmuseum.org/>)
- [The Poem in Dickinson's Hand](#) — See an image of the poem in Dickinson's own handwriting at the Emily Dickinson Archive. ([https://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image\\_sets/12170244](https://www.edickinson.org/editions/2/image_sets/12170244))
- [A Discussion of Dickinson](#) — Listen to a radio discussion about the poet. (<https://www.youtube.com/>)

[watch?v=SDBADIHwchQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SDBADIHwchQ))

- [A Brief Biography](#) – Visit the Poetry Foundation to learn more about Dickinson's life and work. (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/emily-dickinson>)

## LITCHARTS ON OTHER EMILY DICKINSON POEMS

- [A Bird, came down the Walk](#)
- [After great pain, a formal feeling comes –](#)
- [A narrow Fellow in the Grass](#)
- [An awful Tempest mashed the air—](#)
- [As imperceptibly as grief](#)
- [Because I could not stop for Death —](#)
- [Before I got my eye put out](#)
- [Hope is the thing with feathers](#)
- [I dwell in Possibility –](#)
- [I felt a Funeral, in my Brain](#)
- [I heard a Fly buzz - when I died -](#)
- [I like to see it lap the Miles](#)
- [I measure every Grief I meet](#)
- [I'm Nobody! Who are you?](#)
- [I started Early — Took my Dog —](#)
- [I taste a liquor never brewed](#)
- [It was not Death, for I stood up](#)
- [Much Madness is divinest Sense -](#)
- [My Life had stood - a Loaded Gun](#)

- [Safe in their Alabaster Chambers](#)
- [Success is counted sweetest](#)
- [Tell all the truth but tell it slant –](#)
- [The Brain—is wider than the Sky—](#)
- [There is no Frigate like a Book](#)
- [There's a certain Slant of light](#)
- [The Sky is low – the Clouds are mean](#)
- [The Soul selects her own Society](#)
- [They shut me up in Prose –](#)
- [This is my letter to the world](#)
- [We grow accustomed to the Dark](#)
- [Wild nights - Wild nights!](#)



## HOW TO CITE

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