

DICKINSON

Written by

Alena Smith, 2016

Alena Smith
C/o Chris Licata, Paradigm
(310) 288-8000
Internetalena@gmail.com

SLIDE SHOW - OVER BLACK

The whirring sound of an old-fashioned slide projector. Each image that appears is small, at the center of the screen. They are dusty photographs, relics from another time.

NARRATOR

Emily Dickinson was born in 1830,
in Amherst, Massachusetts.

A picture of Emily Dickinson appears. (There's only one known photo of her in existence, so it's this one.)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

She lived throughout her life in
her father's house.

A picture of the big, yellow Dickinson Homestead.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Near the end of her life, she
rarely left her own room.

A picture of Emily's bedroom: sparse, Puritanical.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Aside from a few anonymous verses,
she remained unpublished.

A picture of one of Emily's poems, scrawled in pencil, on a scrap of paper.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

When she died, her poems were
discovered.

More poems. Little hand-sewn books of poems. The slides start moving faster.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Some of the strangest, most
fascinating poems ever written.

More, more. Faster, faster. There are poems on envelopes. Notecards. Candy wrappers.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Almost two thousand of them.
Hidden. In a maid's trunk.

The slide reel appears to burn itself out. Darkness.

CUT TO:

CLOSE-UP - A GIRL'S FACE

The face fills the frame. And looks directly at us. The skin is pale, luminous. The lips are wry, slightly twisted. The eyebrows, rakish. And the eyes - the eyes are so intelligent, it's scary.

A hand comes to the lips. The hand holds a cigarette. This girl is SMOKING.

EXT. AMHERST COLLEGE, 1855 - DAY

The girl, in a WHITE DRESS, leans against the brick wall of a college building, smoking a rolled cigarette.

It is springtime. The green lawns of the college are immaculate. A BUMBLEBEE buzzes on a clover.

The girl takes another drag, and exhales a perfect SMOKE CIRCLE.

Suddenly, a MAN rides up, on one of those Victorian-era BICYCLES. He's a stiff, gray-haired professor-type, in a long black coat.

He nearly topples off his bike when he sees the girl.

MAN

(indignant)

What's this?! Women are not allowed on the grounds of the college. And *smoking*?! The very idea... I'll put a stop to this. Who are you?

The girl looks at him, ironic, unruffled.

GIRL

I'm nobody. Who are you.

The man sputters.

MAN

I, young lady, am the prefect. And I'll give you one more chance, before I have you dragged from this campus by force. Identify yourself! Who are you?!

The girl, slowly, takes another drag. We push in on her face again, as she answers.

GIRL

I'm Emily Fucking Dickinson.

MUSIC. Specifically, Kendrick Lamar, "King Kunta" (2015). This twenty-first century anthem of black empowerment becomes, for now, an anthem of Victorian white-girl empowerment. What, you have a problem with that?

EXT. WOODS - DAY

With Kendrick as her underscore, EMILY DICKINSON, 25 years old, struts through the woods of 19th-century Amherst.

KENDRICK

*"Bitch where you when I was
walkin'? / Now I run the game, got
the whole world talkin'..."*

As she walks, and walks, the weeds and brambles whip at the bottom of her dress, getting it dirty. The wind reddens her cheeks. Untidies her hair.

KENDRICK (CONT'D)

*"Everybody wanna cut the legs off
him / Black man, take no losses..."*

She looks exhilarated. But also like she could kill somebody.

TITLE: DICKINSON

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - BEFORE DAWN

Four a.m. in the mid-19th century -- dark and quiet as shit. Emily wakes up in her small, creaky bed. She throws off the covers.

She grabs a shawl, lights a kerosene lamp, and sits down at her tiny, cramped writing desk. Takes out a pencil and a scrap of paper. Thinks. Chews her pencil.

Then -- she gets into it. Writing. Writing. Lightning striking in her brain.

And then -- an interruption. A KNOCK on the door. From outside, her sister's voice.

LAVINIA (O.S.)

Emily! Emily, wake up!

Emily crouches, like a tiger, then explodes.

EMILY

What the fuck!

She slams down her pencil, bangs over to the door, opens it.

Her sister, LAVINIA, 22, plump and curvy with a gap between her teeth, is standing there, holding a BUCKET.

LAVINIA

You have to go fetch water.

Emily glares at her.

EMILY

It is four in the god damn morning,
Lavinia. I am *writing*. Wri-ting.

LAVINIA

Mother says you have to go. I did
it yesterday.

EMILY

Why doesn't Austin do it?

LAVINIA

Austin's a boy, Emily! He doesn't
do chores!

Emily shakes her head.

EMILY

This is such bullshit.

Lavinia shrugs, and hands Emily the bucket.

EXT. PATH FROM THE WELL - SUNRISE

Emily trudges back from the well with her bucket full of water, as the first light of day appears in the sky.

She half-whispers, still trying to puzzle out her new poem.

EMILY

(under her breath)

"Because I could not stop for
Death"... "Because I could not stop
for Death"...

She thinks up another line, and stops dead in her tracks.
Half the water sloshes out of the bucket. She doesn't care.

She puts the bucket down. Takes a little pencil and paper out
of her dress pocket. She scribbles.

EMILY (V.O.)

"Because I could not stop for Death
- He kindly stopped for me."

Up in a tree, a BIRD chirps. Emily smiles.

EXT. DICKINSON HOMESTEAD - MORNING

An establishing shot of the BIG YELLOW HOUSE where Emily Dickinson spent almost all of her life. A pristine, imposing New England mansion, set amongst woods and hayfields. The window up on the right is Emily's room.

This is Main Street, Amherst, 1855 -- not exactly bustling. But still, any action that goes on in the town, the Dickinsons are right in the thick of it.

Now, Emily emerges from the path, with her bucket, and enters through a SIDE DOOR.

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Emily's MOTHER, Mrs. Dickinson (think Laurie Metcalf), and Lavinia are already hard at work in the overheated kitchen.

Mrs. Dickinson tends to a RAGING FIRE on the hearth, while Lavinia PLUCKS A CHICKEN. As Emily enters, Mrs. Dickinson attacks her.

MOTHER

We needed that water an hour ago!
Where have you - oh, Emily, this
bucket's half-empty! You let it all
spill out! Oh, you're a useless
girl. Useless!

Emily rolls her eyes. This is obviously a familiar routine.

EMILY

Can't we just get a maid?

Mrs. Dickinson is appalled.

MOTHER

Over my dead body.

EMILY

But why? We can afford one.

MOTHER

It's not for you to say what we can
and can't afford, you wicked thing.

EMILY

We own six fricking *horses*, Mom. We
can get a maid.

MOTHER

When your father married me, I said he was getting the best housewife in all Hampshire County. No - in all New England! I'd rather scrub the skin off my fingers than hire a maid. And I'm bringing you girls up to be just like me.

EMILY

But--

MOTHER

(cutting her off)

You're going to make a good housewife someday, Emily Dickinson, if it kills me.

Mrs. Dickinson claps some flour on her hands, and begins kneading a huge pile of dough.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

Now - you need to go get dressed. We have another gentleman coming to see you.

LAVINIA

Ooh! A gentleman?!

EMILY

Mom, *no* --

MOTHER

He'll be here quite soon. So go upstairs and prepare yourself. This man could very well be your husband.

LAVINIA

So romantic!

EMILY

(dark)

I wonder what hideous deformity this one will have.

MOTHER

Don't be rude. And you better not pull any stunts like you did last time.

EMILY

I made an offering.

MOTHER

You dropped a dead mouse in that
poor man's lap.

EMILY

Yes. Like a cat.

MOTHER

You are not a cat, Emily!

EMILY

No. Tragically, I am a woman.

Emily exits, but not before grabbing one of the FRESH SCONES
her mother has just pulled from the oven.

MOTHER

Those scones are for the suitor!

Emily's gone. Mother shakes her head. Lavinia looks annoyed.

LAVINIA

Why don't I get to have suitors?

MOTHER

I'm not trying to marry you off.
You're good at housework.

LAVINIA

So I have to die an old maid
because I can fetch water?!

MOTHER

Life isn't fair, Lavinia.

The Dickinson women go back to work.

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - DAY

Emily, in her room, is sneaking another chance to work on her
poem. She sits at her tiny desk, and scribbles. She hasn't
changed her clothes or brushed her hair or anything.

From downstairs, she hears Lavinia screaming.

LAVINIA (O.S.)

Emily! He's here!

Frustrated, she slams her pencil down.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Mrs. Dickinson sits in the parlor drinking tea with the suitor, GEORGE. George is gawky, but cute -- a Jesse Eisenberg type. Mrs. Dickinson sips her tea, embarrassed.

MOTHER

She'll be down in a moment. I do apologize.

GEORGE

(awkward)

Oh - no worries.

Now Emily makes her entrance. She has brushed her hair so that it all HANGS IN FRONT OF HER FACE. Like Cousin It. She looks like a woman walking backwards. She looks insane.

She walks into the room slowly, her hair blocking her vision.

EMILY

(dramatically)

Hello.

Mrs. Dickinson gasps.

MOTHER

Emily - cut that out!

Emily laughs, and flips her hair back, so she can see. Then she looks at the suitor. She recognizes him.

EMILY

Oh, for fuck's sake. George?!

GEORGE

Hey, Emily.

Mrs. Dickinson is baffled.

MOTHER

You have already made my daughter's acquaintance?

EMILY

Mom, this is George. He's in the lit club with Austin. We hang out all the time.

Mrs. Dickinson's hand is trembling on her teacup.

MOTHER

Well. I was just telling *George* here what an excellent *wife* you will be. How frugal and punctilious you are in all your duties--

EMILY

Oh, yeah - I'm a real catch.

Emily flops down in an armchair and, literally, lights a cigarette. Mrs. Dickinson almost faints.

MOTHER

You put that out right now!

EMILY

(exhaling)

George, can I talk to you for a second? Outside?

George leaps up, eager for a chance to be alone with her.

GEORGE

Totally!

EMILY

Cool. Mom - we'll be on the porch. Try to relax.

Emily heads outside. George follows. Mrs. Dickinson looks up at the ceiling, praying for help.

EXT. SIDE PORCH - DAY

Emily leans against the porch railing, and takes out another cigarette. George scrambles to light it for her.

EMILY

What are you even doing here, George?

GEORGE

I just wanted to see you. (*Beat.*) I always want to see you.

EMILY

You know I'm not going to marry you, right?

GEORGE

Never say never, Emily. Like you wrote in your poem - "I dwell in Possibility."

EMILY

Nice. I love when people quote me.

GEORGE

Why won't you marry me? I'm not good enough for you?

EMILY

You don't understand - I'm not going to marry *anyone*.

GEORGE

That's not what your mother says.

EMILY

I have one purpose on this earth, George - and it is to become a great writer. A *husband* would put a stop to that.

GEORGE

I wouldn't.

EMILY

You say that now, but little by little, you would.

Emily stubs out her cigarette. George grabs her by the wrist.

GEORGE

I'm madly in love with you.

EMILY

Well - too bad.

GEORGE

Is there someone else?

EMILY

Actually - yes.

GEORGE

Who is he? I'll kill him.

EMILY

You can't kill him. He is Death.

GEORGE

What?

EMILY

That's right. I'm in love with
Death.

FLASH TO:

EXT. FRONT WALKWAY - NIGHT

A black carriage pulled by white horses rolls up in front of the Homestead, in the moonlight. Emily waits for it, at the bottom of the steps.

EMILY (V.O.)

He takes me out for a carriage
ride, every night. He's a total
gentleman. A silver fox. Sexy as
hell.

The carriage stops, and a HAND reaches out. Emily TAKES THE HAND, and climbs in. The carriage rolls away.

BACK TO:

EXT. SIDE PORCH - CONTINUOUS

George shakes his head, in amazement.

GEORGE

You're such a fucking weirdo. Why
am I so attracted to you?

Emily smiles at him.

GEORGE (CONT'D)

I'd do anything for you.

EMILY

Well... there is - *something* - you
could do.

GEORGE

Name it.

Emily reaches into the pocket of her dress.

EMILY

You're still editor of the lit mag,
right?

GEORGE

Well - co-editor - but yes.

Emily pulls out a piece of paper, and hands it to him.

EMILY

I want you to publish this.

GEORGE

Whoa! Awesome! You're finally gonna let me publish one of your poems?!

EMILY

Well - I've rewritten it forty times - I'm still not sure it's ready, but...

GEORGE

This is perfect timing. We have a little space in our newest issue - I can sneak this in. It goes to print tomorrow.

EMILY

Really?! Tomorrow?!

He nods.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Okay - but wait.

GEORGE

What is it?

EMILY

You can't print my name.

GEORGE

What? Why not?

Emily looks over her shoulder. Paranoid.

EMILY

My father doesn't approve of women publishing.

GEORGE

Oh, come on. That's stupid. You're a genius, Emily - he has to approve of that.

A TAPPING on the windowpane interrupts them. Emily looks and sees Lavinia inside, waving at her to hurry up and come in.

EMILY

Couldn't you put my initials or something? Or like - anonymous.

GEORGE

No way. You deserve credit. And you should stand up to your father.

Emily's silent, thinking this over. Then she smiles.

EMILY

You know what? Fuck it. You're right. Publish it, with my name and everything. Thank you, George.

GEORGE

(pocketing the poem)

Any time, Miss Dickinson.

George leans forward, and KISSES Emily on the lips. Then, he hops over the porch railing, and takes off, down the lawn.

Lavinia, through the window, makes a kissy-kissy face at Emily. Emily sticks a finger in her mouth like, gag me.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Emily marches back into the parlor, where her mother and sister are cleaning up.

EMILY

That was a disaster.

MOTHER

Yes, Emily, you ruined it again.

LAVINIA

She didn't ruin it! They were kissing! I saw!

MOTHER

(scandalized)

Kissing?! My god! What is wrong with you?!

EMILY

You're the one who keeps *throwing* me at these men!

MOTHER

I'm not *throwing* you--

EMILY

Yes you are! It's humiliating! You'd pawn me off on a widower, a cripple - anyone who would take me!

(MORE)

EMILY (CONT'D)

The whole town of *Amherst* knows how bad you want to get rid of me!

At this moment, Emily's father, EDWARD DICKINSON, appears in the doorway.

As soon as he enters the room, the energy changes. He's in charge of this family - a bona fide New England patriarch, in a top hat and tails.

Mr. Dickinson can be tough, even harsh, which is why it would be great if he was played by someone adorable (say, Bob Balaban). He loves his daughter Emily enormously, but their relationship contains much darkness and complexity.

Now, he regards his wife and daughters the way a farmer might look at some chickens.

EDWARD

What's all the fuss?

EMILY

Mother's trying to disown me again.

MOTHER

You're twenty-five years old, Emily! I was married at eighteen - it's high time for you to find a husband!

EMILY

And move out, you mean!?

MOTHER

Well yes, that *is* what happens when girls get married!

LAVINIA

Why doesn't anyone care if *I* get a husband?!

Edward puts his hands up, shushing them all.

EDWARD

Emily doesn't have to marry anyone, as far as I'm concerned.

EMILY

Thank you, Dad. Jesus - at least somebody around here isn't trying to kick me out of the family.

MOTHER

(to Edward, annoyed)
So you'd just let her stay here, in
our house, till kingdom come, doing
nothing all day--

EMILY

I do plenty!

MOTHER

Oh, like what?

EMILY

I'm the one who found all those
bird's nests.

She points.

INSERT:

In the corner, on a table, is a HUGE PILE OF BIRD'S NESTS.

BACK TO:

EDWARD

(ending the discussion)
All right. It's time for you ladies
to clear out, so I can enjoy my
pipe and newspaper in peace.

He settles into his armchair. Mrs. Dickinson picks up a tray.

MOTHER

Very well. We should get back to
the kitchen, anyway. Girls, come
with me.

EMILY

God, do I have to?!

MOTHER

(staring at her)
You have a shitty attitude, young
lady.

EMILY

I just don't want to do *chores*
twenty-four hours a day.

MOTHER

And what would you do instead?

Everybody looks at Emily.

EMILY

I would just - *think*.

Mrs. Dickinson sighs. Edward lights his pipe, and chuckles.

EDWARD

Let her have a break, Mother. It's all right.

EMILY

Thanks, Daddy! You're my hero.

She kisses her father on the cheek, and runs out of the room.

Mrs. Dickinson looks at her husband, coldly.

MOTHER

You just love taking her side, don't you.

Edward shrugs.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

You're going to regret it. She's wild. She doesn't know how to behave like a proper young lady. And she'll be the ruin of this family.

With that, Mrs. Dickinson exits. Edward puffs on his pipe.

EXT. GRASSY AREA - DAY

Emily lies face-down on a patch of grass, in the sun, staring at a BUMBLEBEE. The bee is fat, and buzzy, ass-deep in a dandelion.

A SHADOW falls over Emily, and the bee. She looks up. It's her older brother, AUSTIN.

AUSTIN

What up, sis.

EMILY

(shading her eyes)
Nothin', bro. Just chillin'.

Austin, 28, is tall and handsome (think Benjamin Walker, or Anders from *Workaholics*). Secretly, he's a bit insecure about his intellect -- especially in comparison to his supremely gifted sister.

AUSTIN
Heard you turned down another
suitor.

EMILY
Yeah. Not into it.

AUSTIN
Well - on the subject of marriage.
I have news.

Emily squints up at him.

EMILY
What news?

AUSTIN
I proposed to Sue. And she said
yes.

FLASH TO:

EXT. BACK OF A HAY WAGON - DAY

In the back of a hay wagon, Austin is GOING DOWN on his girlfriend, SUE. The wagon jostles violently. Austin's head is up under Sue's dress. Sue leans back, eyes closed, in pleasure.

SUE
Yes. Yes...

Austin emerges from under Sue's skirt, grinning.

BACK TO:

EXT. GRASSY AREA - CONTINUOUS

Emily looks like she's just been slapped.

EMILY
No. You can't marry Sue.

AUSTIN
Why not?

EMILY
Austin, she's my *best friend*.

AUSTIN

Look, Emily, don't get crazy right now - it's not a good time. Sue's sister Mary is dead.

EMILY

What?! But she was the healthy one.

AUSTIN

I know. But then she got typhus and died, like all the others. We have to go to the funeral in an hour.

EMILY

Jesus. Poor Sue.

AUSTIN

Yeah. So just - be respectful of her situation, okay?

EMILY

You don't have to tell *me* to be *respectful* of my *best friend*.

AUSTIN

Be respectful of the woman who is going to be my wife.

Austin turns and walks off.

Emily stands there, flooded with rage, as a SONG blasts on -- Taylor Swift, "Bad Blood."

TAYLOR

*"Cause baby now we got bad blood /
Hey / Now we got problems..."*

As the song plays, we see Emily SHRINK DOWN TO THE SIZE OF THE BUMBLEBEE.

TAYLOR (CONT'D)

*"And I don't think we can solve
them / You made a really deep cut /
And baby now we got bad blood!"*

EXT. DANDELION - FANTASY

Emily and the BUMBLEBEE sit together on the BRIGHT YELLOW DANDELION, drinking from giant tumblers full of liquor.

Emily is WASTED. The BEE is yellow, black, and fuzzy, with big eyes.

EMILY

It's so obvious what's going on here. Austin knows I love Sue and he's trying to steal her from me. He's such an asshole.

BEE

(lighting up a joint)
Girl, don't let this relationship shit get in the way of your career.

EMILY

That's so smart. You're so right.

BEE

Just make dat honey, bitch. Make dat honey.

He hands her the joint, and she takes a HUGE HIT.

CUT TO:

EXT. CEMETERY - DAY

At the funeral of Sue's sister Mary. A sizable crowd, including all the Dickinsons, stands around the grave as the COFFIN gets lowered into the ground.

MINISTER

(intoning)
"O Death, where is thy victory? O
Death, where is thy sting?"

Emily is dressed in white, as always. She looks across the grave and sees SUE, dressed in black.

Sue is very, very beautiful -- and very, very sad.

She wipes a tear away, and gives Emily a small smile. Emily mouths at Sue: "I love you." Sue looks down at the grave.

The minister wraps up his final prayer and men begin SHOVELING DIRT over the coffin.

Emily fights her way through the crowd, trying to get to Sue, but just before she reaches her friend's side, AUSTIN beats her to the punch. He takes Sue by the arm, protectively, and leads her off down the hill.

Emily stands there, irritated. Funeral guests pass by her on all sides, on their way down the hill.

Now, Emily looks behind her and sees A STRANGE MAN.

The man is tall, with SILVER HAIR, and a GRAY SUIT. He's very attractive, if intense (think Viggo Mortensen). The MAN catches Emily's eye. He WINKS at her.

Just then, LAVINIA appears at her sister's side. She sees Emily staring into the distance.

LAVINIA

Emily - what are you looking at?

Emily, rapt, points.

EMILY

At my friend over there.

Lavinia looks where she's pointing. We see what Lavinia sees, which is NOTHING.

LAVINIA

What do you mean? That tree?

We look again, and once again see what Emily sees - the MAN, who is now walking over towards them.

EMILY

Never mind, Lavinia.

The man comes right over to them. He leans in and whispers into Emily's ear.

MAN

See you tonight.

Emily nods, blushing. The man walks away.

Lavinia is confused, but then, she's used to her sister being weird.

LAVINIA

Come on, Emily. Let's go home.

Emily and Lavinia walk together, down the hill.

LAVINIA (CONT'D)

That was a lovely funeral, don't you think?

Emily shrugs.

EMILY

Mine will be better.

As Emily and Lavinia walk, they pass by a GROUP OF GIRLS, well-dressed and well-coiffed. Emily overhears them, gossiping about her.

GIRL

Oh my god, it's Emily Dickinson.

The girls all titter.

GIRL (CONT'D)

She's so intense. I seriously cannot handle her.

Emily pretends not to have heard them. She lifts her chin proudly and marches down the hill with her sister.

INT. PARLOR - DAY

Austin and Sue sit on the very stiff couch. Mr. and Mrs. Dickinson sit across from them, on two very stiff armchairs.

They are all in their funeral clothes. Sue's face is bleak.

EDWARD

Well. We are very happy for you.

Awkward silence.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

I mean - we're very sorry about your sister, Sue. But we're very happy you two shall be wed.

Austin smiles. Sue, if it is possible, looks even bleaker.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

So, Austin. What are your plans?

MOTHER

Yes, dear, tell us.

Austin takes Sue's hand.

AUSTIN

Well - obviously, nothing is decided yet, but... there is a firm, in Michigan. They have offered me a position. And Sue has a cousin there, so...

He trails off. His father stares at him, blankly.

EDWARD

So what.

AUSTIN

So - we're thinking of moving to Detroit.

Silence.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm pretty psyched about it, actually.

Edward coughs.

EDWARD

I don't think so.

Austin looks at his father, confused.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

You'll join my firm, and stay right here in Amherst.

AUSTIN

But - Father, like I just *said*, I want to go out West...

EDWARD

Nonsense. We can't have you living so far. This is Amherst. You are a Dickinson. Your grandfather lived here, and his father before that. Right here in this house.

Austin stands up in frustration, and paces to the window.

Behind him, OUT THE WINDOW, we notice A WICKER BASKET, that is being lowered down BY A STRING.

Austin doesn't see the basket. He's flipping out at his dad.

AUSTIN

Okay - so what do you expect - that Sue and I will get married and live *upstairs*?!

EDWARD

Of course not. Don't be absurd.

(beat)

You'll live next door.

AUSTIN

Next *door*?! What - in the Irish
shanties?! With the *stable* boys?

EDWARD

Austin, collect yourself. The lot
adjacent has come up for sale. I
mean to purchase it. We shall build
you a house.

Austin gapes at his father.

Meanwhile, Sue, from the couch, has noticed the BASKET. She
points at it, wordlessly.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

The most modern, most elegant of
houses. You may oversee the design
yourselves. It can be built by
fall. Consider it a wedding gift.

Austin doesn't know what to say. He looks at Sue, who is
pointing at the window.

AUSTIN

What *is* it, Sue?

He turns around, and sees the BASKET. Irritated, he tugs the
window open, and pulls the basket inside.

INSERT:

The basket. Which holds AN ENVELOPE.

Austin pulls the envelope out. It says: "**For Sue.**"

Austin ignores this. He rips the envelope open.

Inside is ANOTHER ENVELOPE. It says: "**Austin. Do not read
this. Give it to Sue.**"

BACK TO:

Austin, aggravated, hands the envelope over to Sue.

Sue takes it, opens it, and pulls out a notecard.

INSERT:

The notecard. Which says, in Emily's handwriting: "**Meet me in
the woods.**"

BACK TO:

Sue looks at Austin. He shakes his head. Sue gets up and leaves the room.

Austin looks like he wants to punch somebody in the face.

EXT. WOODS - DAY

Deep in the woods behind the Dickinson house, Emily stands with her arms folded, looking pissed off.

Sue comes walking towards her. The two girls face off.

EMILY

Is this some kind of fucking joke?

Sue says nothing.

EMILY (CONT'D)

You're *marrying* my brother? Are you insane?

SUE

What else was I supposed to do, Emily? My entire family is dead.

EMILY

I know, and I feel terrible about that, but - *Austin*?! You don't even like him! You told me that you don't respect his *intellect*.

Sue shrugs.

EMILY (CONT'D)

And besides, I thought we were never getting married. I thought we were going to grow up and become great writers together.

SUE

That's a stupid promise we made when we were fourteen years old. And even then, I knew it was a lie. I'm not like you, Emily. I didn't grow up with money. I don't get to prance around a gorgeous mansion all day and get away with never doing my chores. I don't have your perfect fucking life.

EMILY

You think my life is *perfect*?! Do you even *know* me?!

SUE

I'm all alone in this world. I'm destitute. If I don't marry Austin, I will literally starve to death.

EMILY

So you're marrying him for his money. Cool. Very cool.

SUE

Spoken like a true fucking rich girl.

They glare at each other. Then Emily softens.

EMILY

I'm sorry about Mary. I really liked her.

SUE

Yeah. I liked her too. She was my favorite sister.

EMILY

Well - since you're marrying Austin - I guess I'll be your sister now.

They look at each other.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Promise me something, Sue.

SUE

What.

EMILY

Okay, promise me two things.

Sue waits.

EMILY (CONT'D)

Number one, that you won't move away to Michigan. *(Beat.)* And number two -

SUE

Yeah?

EMILY

That you will always love me more than him.

For the first time, we see something like a SMILE glimmer over Sue's face.

SUE

Well. As far as the first one goes -
that's really Austin's decision.
But as far as the second -

EMILY

Yeah?

SUE

Well, that one's obvious. I love
you so much, Emily. I love you so
much, I think I might go to hell
for it.

A thunderclap. It starts to RAIN. And in the downpour, Emily
takes Sue into her arms, and KISSES HER. Madly, deeply.

The two girls make out furiously in the rain, in the woods.

Now would be a good time for another great song - maybe
something by Lorde? I think you get it.

EXT. LAWN - AFTERNOON

On the lawn, Austin is playing a game of CROQUET with George,
Emily's suitor.

George leans on his MALLET, sipping a glass of SHERRY.

GEORGE

You could have had any girl in
town, and you picked Sue Gilbert?
Why?

Austin lines up a shot, and expertly hits a RED BALL through
a wicket.

AUSTIN

I think it's because she's the only
one who didn't want me.

George laughs, and takes a shot. He misses.

GEORGE

Well - I can relate to that. Your
sister is still playing hard to
get.

AUSTIN

I'm afraid my sister really *is* hard
to get, old chap. In the sense of,
hard to comprehend. She's a freak.

GEORGE
She's a genius.

AUSTIN
I'm so sick of people saying that.

Austin takes a big whack at a ball. It goes careening off down the slope, and hits a tree.

At the same time, EMILY and SUE emerge from the woods. They are slightly TOUSLED.

GEORGE
Hello, ladies.

EMILY
What are you doing here, George?

Austin takes Sue possessively by the arm.

AUSTIN
Sue - I need to talk to you about something.

Sue glances at Emily, and then allows herself to be steered away by Austin.

Emily and George are left alone.

George, trying to be cool, takes out a pair of 19th-century wire-framed SUNGLASSES and awkwardly slips them on.

GEORGE
Well, babe. It's done.

Emily looks at him, unimpressed.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Your poem. It's in the *Indicator*.
Right next to a thing I wrote about
Percy Shelley. The printers have it
- it'll be out next week.
(beat)
You're a little bit famous now,
Emily Dickinson.

He grins at her, expecting to see her smile back.

Instead, she looks pale, anxious. She bites her fingernail.

GEORGE (CONT'D)
Emily? What's wrong?

She shakes her head.

EMILY
I'm just - scared.

GEORGE
You?! I've never seen you scared of anything - you're absolutely fearless!

EMILY
I just don't know how my father will react.

George scoffs at this.

GEORGE
Seriously - come on. Your dad is a good guy. I know he's a little conservative - but he loves you. And he's *smart*. He has to know how brilliant you are. And that's not something he'd want to stand in the way of - is it?

Emily looks at George, wanting to believe what he's saying.

Then, from the house, she hears Lavinia, SCREAMING.

LAVINIA (O.S.)
Emily! *EMILY!!!*

CUT TO:

EXT. DOOR TO THE KITCHEN - CONTINUOUS

Lavinia stands outside the door to the kitchen, wearing an APRON, screaming for her sister.

LAVINIA
EMILY! COME! MAKE! *DINNER!!!!*

BACK TO:

EXT. LAWN - CONTINUOUS

Emily nods to George.

EMILY
I gotta go.

She hurries off towards the house - but calls back, over her shoulder.

EMILY (CONT'D)
Thanks again, George!

George leans on his mallet, and watches her go. He sighs.

INT. KITCHEN - EVENING

Pre-dinner CHORES MONTAGE. Fire. Water. Chickens.

Emily CUTTING AN ONION, and CRYING.

INT. DINING ROOM - EVENING

In the dining room, the whole family sits around the table:
Mother, Father, Emily, Austin, Lavinia, and Sue.

The table is laid with beautiful white china, and there's
lots of delicious-looking food.

A KITTEN plays at Lavinia's feet.

Edward tears into a piece of chicken.

EDWARD
Wonderful chicken, Mrs. Dickinson.

Mrs. Dickinson beams.

AUSTIN
It really is delicious, Mother.

MOTHER
Well - thank your sisters. They
helped.

LAVINIA
One of us did.

Emily pinches Lavinia, under the table.

Edward clinks on his glass, with a silver knife.

EDWARD
Now, now, listen here. I have a
rather exciting announcement.

Everyone looks at him, curious.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

As you know, in addition to running my successful law practice, as well as maintaining my position as Treasurer of Amherst College, I've also served two terms in the Massachusetts House of Representatives. Well - I've got my eye on something bigger now.

(beat)

I have decided to run for Congress.

(beat)

Of the United States of America.

General shock and awe. Mrs. Dickinson looks a bit queasy.

AUSTIN

Father - that's marvelous!

EMILY

Holy crap, Dad!

Lavinia's KITTEN, under the table, YOWLS.

EDWARD

I appreciate the enthusiasm. Your mother was quite opposed to the idea.

MOTHER

I just don't want you away from home so much. Candidates are always moving about.

EDWARD

Well, we've got to get out the vote, now, haven't we? The vote, and the message.

SUE

What is your message, Mr. Dickinson?

EDWARD

Mine? Well - it's simple. Let's keep the country together, that's what I say. Let's not be torn apart.

AUSTIN

You mean - by slavery.

LAVINIA

Father, are you an *abolitionist*?

EDWARD

Of course not. I don't care one way or the other about slavery. I just don't think we ought to go to war about it.

MOTHER

Very sensible, dear.

AUSTIN

Personally, I think this Fugitive Slave Act is ridiculous. It's making us regular citizens into slave-hunting patrols.

EDWARD

You're right about that.

EMILY

Sometimes I feel like a slave.

Everyone looks at her, horrified.

MOTHER

You are a spoiled girl from Amherst, Emily Dickinson. *Far* from a slave.

Emily takes a bite of chicken.

EDWARD

Well, it's a messy business. But we must preserve the Union, at all costs. That's my platform. Oh - and bring the railroad to Amherst. That too.

LAVINIA

The railroad! Fancy!

EDWARD

Yes, Lavinia, if I'm elected, you shall hear the sound of a train whistle out your bedroom window!

EMILY

That sounds like a nightmare.

Sue giggles.

EDWARD

I see I may have a problem convincing some of my constituency.

Austin, now, clinks on his glass.

AUSTIN

Well, congratulations, Father. And we have an announcement to make as well.

Everyone looks at him.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Sue and I have discussed it - and we will not be moving to Detroit. We're staying here in Amherst - with the family.

EMILY

Hurray!

MOTHER

Oh, that's wonderful, darling.

EDWARD

Excellent, excellent! You can hold the firm together, while I'm off running my campaign.

Austin nods, uneasy.

MOTHER

Oh, we'll have a big, lovely wedding! We'll invite all the Dickinson and Norcross cousins - and Sue, of course, your whole family will come--

SUE

My whole family is dead.

Awkward silence.

MOTHER

Well.

(beat)

It will still be very nice.

Now, suddenly, Emily CLINKS ON HER GLASS.

EDWARD

What is it, Emily?

EMILY

I also have an announcement.

Heads turn to her.

EMILY (CONT'D)

It's not that big of a deal. I mean, compared to Congress, and getting married, and whatever.

MOTHER

Well, what is it, then?

She takes a deep breath.

EMILY

A poem I wrote - is going to be published. Next week. In the college magazine.

Absolute silence. Deafening, hair-raising silence. Silence that could crush you.

Then, Edward speaks - very low, and icy.

EDWARD

I don't think I heard you correctly. Say that again.

The color goes out of Emily's face.

EMILY

My poem - will be published.

EDWARD

How. Dare. You.

Emily's face gets even more pale, as she realizes how ugly this is going to be.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Have I, or have I not, made it quite clear that I do not approve of a woman seeking to build herself a *literary* reputation?

Emily, barely, nods.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

And yet you have gone and done it.

Silence.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Well. Is there any way to stop it?

Emily, scared, shakes her head.

EMILY

(quiet)

It's already gone to print.

Edward SLAMS HIS FIST DOWN on the table.

EDWARD

You - *wicked* - girl! You will bring
shame upon this family!

Emily looks at her MOTHER, and finds only more disapproval.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

(shouting)

Your mother was right! We have
given you too much freedom - and
you have taken advantage of our
kindness! Oh, this is a bad time,
Emily - a very bad time indeed,
that you have chosen to exhibit
such scandalous behavior! My god,
you will ruin the good name of
DICKINSON!!!

Again, Edward slams BOTH FISTS down. The plates CLATTER.

Everyone besides him and Emily, all at once, GETS UP AND
LEAVES THE ROOM.

Emily is alone at the big table with her father, and his
rage.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Do you not understand, Emily, that
we have a reputation to protect in
this town?

He waits for a response. She says nothing.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Speak to me when I address you.
SPEAK!!!

EMILY

(hoarse)

Yes, Father.

EDWARD

The Dickinsons have lived in
Amherst for two hundred years. We
made this town what it is. Everyone
knows that.

(MORE)

EDWARD (CONT'D)

But your grandfather was a drunk,
and a debtor, and he practically
squandered everything my ancestors
worked so hard to build. I've spent
my life cleaning up his mess. I've
scrimped, and sacrificed - and by
God's grace, I've restored our
family to its good standing. And
now, I refuse to have my efforts
undone BY MY OWN DAUGHTER!!!

Another fist-slam on the table.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

This - *foolishness* of yours - we
will have no more of it. You will
be correct and proper in all your
ways. You will tend to your duties,
as your mother does. You have much
room for improvement, there. Look -
I see my plate is chipped. You set
the table, didn't you? Do you give
the master of the house a *chipped*
plate?

Emily is silent.

EDWARD (CONT'D)

Now. As punishment - you will clean
up in here. And in the kitchen.
Alone.

Edward stands up and leaves.

Emily waits a moment, by herself. The room is silent.

Then, she stands up. Walks around to her father's place.
Picks up his PLATE. It is, indeed, CHIPPED.

Emily stares at the plate for a second. Then, she turns
around and HURLS IT at the STONE FIREPLACE.

The plate SHATTERS.

EXT. FRONT WALKWAY - NIGHT

From a distance, we see Emily waiting outside the house, in
the moonlight. She wears an overcoat, and a scarf.

A BLACK CARRIAGE pulled by WHITE HORSES rolls up.

A HAND reaches out of the carriage. Takes Emily's hand. She
steps in.

The carriage ROLLS AWAY.

INT. CARRIAGE - NIGHT

Inside the carriage, Emily sits across from her companion: the STRANGE MAN she saw earlier, at the funeral.

This is Emily's lover. This is DEATH.

DEATH

Nice to see you.

EMILY

You were late.

DEATH

Most people would be glad if I never came.

EMILY

Not me. I always want to see you.

Death smiles at her.

DEATH

So, your poem is going to be published.

EMILY

No. Father won't allow it.

DEATH

I thought you said it was too late to stop it.

EMILY

Father will burn every copy, if he has to. Anything to prevent me from ruining the good name of Dickinson.

Death laughs.

DEATH

My dear, you'll be the only Dickinson they talk about in two hundred years. I promise you that.

EMILY

Even if my poems are never published?

DEATH

Publicity is not the same as
immortality.

EMILY

Immortality is nothing. All it
takes is being very good and well-
behaved. And then you go to heaven.

DEATH

That's not the kind I mean. Your
immortality will not come from
following the rules. It will come
from breaking them.

Emily smiles at him.

EMILY

Today at Mary's funeral, they said
she was going to heaven. Is it
true?

Death shrugs.

DEATH

I suppose. She was kind of *blah*.

Emily laughs. Her body relaxes into the seat. She looks at
Death, flirtatiously.

EMILY

When will you come for me?

DEATH

I come for you every night, my
darling.

EMILY

No - not just for a ride. To take
me away from this place.

DEATH

Ah. Not for many, many years.

EMILY

But you took Mary. Do you love her
more than me?

Death just laughs. He pats the seat next to him. Emily gets
up and squeezes in beside him.

The carriage RIDES THROUGH THE DARKENED STREETS OF AMHERST,
under the moon.

INT. KITCHEN - NIGHT

Emily is finishing up the arduous task of cleaning the entire kitchen by herself, after dinner.

She is sweaty, dirty, and tired.

She wipes a hand on her forehead. Some ASHES from the fireplace SMUDGE her brow.

INT. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY - NIGHT

Emily trudges upstairs and runs into Austin, in the upstairs hallway. He's in his pajamas.

AUSTIN

Another fight with Dad, huh?

Emily shakes her head, exhausted.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Don't be too hard on him, Em. I know he can be tough - but he only wants to protect us.

Emily says nothing.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Can I tell you a secret?

She looks at him.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

I'm happy we're not moving to Detroit. I feel better here, with the family.

Emily gives him a small smile.

AUSTIN (CONT'D)

Hey - do me a favor.

EMILY

Yeah?

AUSTIN

Do what you can - to cheer up Sue. She's so depressed. I'm worried about her.

EMILY

Sure. Of course.

AUSTIN
Thanks, sis.

The siblings are now interrupted by the appearance of their MOTHER, in her nightgown.

MOTHER
Emily - get to sleep. We need you up bright and early tomorrow. Another suitor is coming.

EMILY
Oh, great. Who is it this time?

MOTHER
A pig farmer, from South Hadley.

EMILY
Sexy.

Austin laughs. Mother shoos them both off to their rooms.

MOTHER
Go to bed!

INT. EMILY'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

In the moonlit shadows of her bedroom, Emily sits at her tiny writing desk, by the window.

She lights a candle, takes out her pencil, closes her eyes, and thinks.

EMILY (V.O.)
"Because I could not stop for
Death..."

There is a KNOCK on her door.

Startled, she leaps up, BLOWS OUT the candle, and JUMPS IN BED, under the covers.

Another KNOCK.

EMILY
(from bed)
Who is it?

The door opens. Standing in the doorway is her FATHER. He's wearing a nightgown himself, and a knitted nightcap.

EDWARD
Emily. Are you awake.

EMILY
(sitting up)
Yes, Father.

EDWARD
May I come in?

EMILY
Yes, you may.

Edward comes in, shuts the door behind him. He sits down on the bed, next to Emily.

He waits a beat or two, then speaks.

EDWARD
I was rather gruff with you
tonight.

Another beat.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
I'd hate to think that you were
angry with me.

She says nothing.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
You just - you can't know how I
worry about you children.

He looks at her. Then, unexpectedly, he BREAKS INTO A SOB.

EDWARD (CONT'D)
(crying)
Oh, Emily!

EMILY
(disturbed)
Father, what is it! Oh, Father,
don't cry!

EDWARD
I just don't want to lose you,
Emmy. Promise me! Promise me, okay?

EMILY
Promise you what?

EDWARD
Promise you won't get married and
move away.

Edward clutches Emily's hand, and stares at her through his tears. It's touching, though deeply strange.

EMILY

I won't leave you, Dad.

He smiles.

EDWARD

Oh, that makes me happy. Keep the family together, that's what I say. Don't let it get torn apart.

Now Edward lies down in Emily's narrow bed, beside her. His head rests on her pillow. She lies down next to him.

EMILY

Hey Dad. Can you promise me something, too?

EDWARD

What is it, my dear?

Emily stares up at the ceiling.

EMILY

Promise me - that we can hire a maid.

Edward, against all his better judgement, laughs.

EDWARD

Oh, Emily. All right.

She grins. He closes his eyes, and within seconds, FALLS FAST ASLEEP. He starts to SNORE.

As soon as Emily realizes that he's sleeping, she carefully CLIMBS OUT OF BED, and returns to her WRITING DESK.

She sits down AT HER DESK, in the moonlight. She starts to write.

EMILY (V.O.)

"Because I could not stop for Death
/ He kindly stopped for me. / The
carriage held but just ourselves /
And immortality."

She finishes writing. Punctuates her sentence. Leans back.

EMILY

(to herself)
Nailed it.

A FINAL BURST OF MUSIC. This time, it's KANYE. The remix of the Daft Punk song, "Stronger."

KANYE

*"N-n-now that don't kill me / Can
only make me stronger..."*

We leave Emily, at her desk, and GO OUT THE WINDOW, into the night.

KANYE (CONT'D)

*"I need you to hurry up now / Cause
I can't wait much longer..."*

The big Dickinson house glows, eerie, in the moonlight.

In the sky, there are thousands of stars.

FADE OUT.