

# A Narrow Fellow in the Grass

*by Emily Dickinson*

## Text of the poem:

A narrow Fellow in the Grass  
Occasionally rides -  
You may have met him? Did you not  
His notice instant is -

The Grass divides as with a Comb,  
A spotted Shaft is seen,  
And then it closes at your Feet  
And opens further on -

He likes a Boggy Acre -  
A Floor too cool for Corn -  
But when a Boy and Barefoot  
I more than once at Noon

Have passed I thought a Whip Lash  
Unbraiding in the Sun  
When stooping to secure it  
It wrinkled And was gone -

Several of Nature's People  
I know, and they know me  
I feel for them a transport  
Of Cordiality

But never met this Fellow  
Attended or alone  
Without a tighter Breathing  
And Zero at the Bone.

'A Narrow Fellow in the Grass' is one of the most famous nature poems written by Emily Dickinson. In this poem, Dickinson describes an encounter with a snake in a grassy field. At first glance, the poem appears to be a simple description of nature and a childhood memory. However, beneath its simple language lies a deep exploration of fear, mystery, human emotions, and humanity's relationship with nature. Dickinson was known for her unique poetic style, unusual punctuation, short lines, and deep psychological insight. In this poem, she transforms an ordinary natural experience into something mysterious and emotionally powerful. The snake becomes more than just an animal; it symbolizes the unknown forces of nature that humans can never fully understand or control. The poem reflects Dickinson's ability to combine beauty and fear together. Nature is shown as attractive and peaceful, yet also dangerous and unpredictable. The speaker feels both fascination and terror toward the snake, which creates tension throughout the poem.

The speaker begins by describing a “narrow fellow,” which later turns out to be a snake moving through the grass. The snake moves smoothly and quickly, dividing the grass as it passes. Sometimes the speaker notices the snake suddenly, while at other times it disappears before being fully seen. The speaker recalls seeing the snake during childhood near marshes and fields. The movement of the snake is compared to the motion of a whip, emphasizing speed and suddenness. Although the speaker feels friendly toward many creatures in nature, the sight of the snake creates fear and discomfort. In the final lines, the speaker admits that even though nature may seem familiar, the encounter with the snake causes a deep feeling of terror that chills the body.

## Themes

### Fear of the Unknown

The poem strongly explores the human fear of the unknown. At first, the speaker does not directly name the snake. Instead, it is called a “narrow fellow.” This indirect description increases suspense and mystery. The snake becomes frightening not because it attacks anyone, but because it is unfamiliar, silent, and difficult to understand. The speaker cannot predict its movements. Its sudden appearance creates anxiety and emotional discomfort. This fear reflects a universal human experience. People often fear things they cannot fully explain or control. The snake symbolizes mysterious forces in life that remain beyond human understanding. Even at the end of the poem, the speaker’s fear remains powerful. The final feeling of “zero at the bone” suggests a deep physical and emotional terror. Dickinson shows how fear can affect both mind and body.

### Human Relationship with Nature

One of the most important aspects of the poem is Dickinson’s portrayal of nature as both beautiful and frightening. The grass, fields, marshes, and sunlight create a calm and peaceful natural setting. However, within this peaceful environment exists the hidden danger of the snake. The snake moves silently and almost magically through the grass. The speaker cannot completely understand or predict it. This creates a sense of mystery. Dickinson suggests that nature is not fully under human control. Human beings may admire nature, but they can never entirely master or understand it. The snake appears unexpectedly and disappears quickly, reminding readers that nature often contains hidden dangers beneath its beauty. Thus, the poem explores the idea that nature can be both beautiful and terrifying at the same time.

### Childhood Experience and Memory

The poem moves between the present and the speaker’s childhood. As a barefoot child at noon, the speaker was innocent and playful. She tried to pick up what she thought was a whip. The memory shows how childhood curiosity can lead to sudden shocks. The experience remains vivid in the speaker’s memory because it combined fascination with fear. Even as an adult, the speaker has not overcome this fear. The snake represents experiences that stay with us and continue to unsettle us throughout life. The memory also suggests the transition from innocent curiosity to mature awareness. As children grow older, they begin to understand that the world contains danger and uncertainty.

## Literary Devices

### Imagery:

Dickinson creates vivid pictures — the grass parting like hair, the spotted body, the wrinkling movement. These images make the scene feel alive and immediate. She uses vivid imagery to make the snake's movement realistic and dramatic. For example, the grass "divides" as the snake moves. Readers can visually imagine the smooth motion through the field. The poem appeals strongly to sight and touch, helping readers experience the speaker's emotions.

### Personification:

Calling the snake a "Fellow" and "Him" gives it human qualities. This makes the creature seem strangely familiar while still remaining mysterious. Personification also increases emotional tension because the snake appears almost intelligent and conscious.

### Metaphor and Symbolism:

Dickinson's symbols are often open-ended, allowing readers to interpret them in different ways. The snake stands for hidden danger and the unknown. The snake itself functions as a major symbol representing fear, danger, mystery, and the unknown.

### Capitalization and Dashes:

Typical of Dickinson's style, she capitalizes nouns (Grass, Fellow, Bone) to give them additional importance. The dashes create pauses and interruptions that reflect uncertainty and sudden emotional reactions. The unusual style also gives the poem a conversational yet fragmented tone.

### Rhythm and Repetition:

The poem mostly follows common meter and rhythm, but shortens in places to quicken the pace, mirroring the sudden movement of the snake. Dickinson uses repeated sounds to create rhythm and movement. Soft sounds imitate the smooth gliding motion of the snake. The musical quality of the poem adds to its mysterious atmosphere.