



PROJECT MUSE®

---

An Open Letter from Emily Dickinson to Billy Collins, Re: A  
Missing Bonnet

Nicole Nguyen

Red Cedar Review, Volume 43, 2008, pp. 17-18 (Article)

Published by Michigan State University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/rcr.0.0001>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/240176>

# An Open Letter from Emily Dickinson to Billy Collins, Re: A Missing Bonnet\*

---

Nicole Nguyen

Dear Mr. Collins,

It has come to my attention  
that you may be in possession  
of a certain bonnet of mine—  
white cotton—white lace—  
white ribbon, tied in a bow  
which you undid,  
*with a light forward pull*  
while I stood—still—  
*on my wide-board, hardwood floor,*  
*facing an open window—*  
watching the lone carriage  
on the street below

A certain slant of light  
*came across my dress,*  
plain and simple and *all white*  
*puddled 'round my feet—*  
you sighed—*in dashes*—not I,  
with every hook unhooked,  
every pearl button undone  
Your hands trembled  
ever so slightly, as you handled  
my whalebone corset  
loosing the ties as I stood,  
afraid that my movement  
would disturb your concentration

My skin tingled from your touch  
softly stroking, light as air,  
the pale expanse of my arms—  
down—to desire's perfect goal,  
your Paradise, your ecstasy—  
but no nearer to your reach  
I tensed—you hesitated—then,  
I sensed the ocean at my feet,  
my head immersed in the stars,  
and it became easy to yield  
to the bliss of new experience

All was silent when it was over  
*save the Fly buzzing on the windowpane*  
You groped your way to the door,  
in the dark—the lamp put away—  
my bonnet clasped in tight fingers,  
feet quickly treading, plank by plank—  
creaking across my Soul



---

\* Please note that phrases in *italics* are versions of lines in Billy Collins's "Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes," *Taking Off Emily Dickinson's Clothes* (London: Picador, 2000).