

## DUST OF SNOW

*Robert Frost*

Superficially, this short poem of eight lines seems to be very simple, but hidden beneath the plain surface, is a deep underlying meaning. As Frost himself wrote: *'It is what is beyond that makes poetry - what is unsaid in any work of art. Its unsaid part is its best part.'*

### Themes:

There are many different themes like –

- i) The healing power of nature
- ii) The importance of insignificant natural events in one's life
- iii) The message that things usually considered to be bad omens and associated with doom and destruction can bring about positive effects.

### Summary:

It's winter and the speaker is standing under a hemlock tree covered with snow and a crow happens to send some snow dust on the man. (***the way the crow makes it happen is left to the reader's imagination: whether the crow was preening itself, whether it was due to the action of landing on the tree or flying off, or whether it was just shifting its feet***).

The speaker says that the snow dust falling on him has resulted in a positive change of mood. The speaker, who regretted doing something that had spoiled his day, suddenly feels relieved and his mood is elevated, thereby saving some part of the day.

### Irony:

The crow and the hemlock tree are usually considered to be harbingers of bad luck and doom, but in the poem, these symbols of bad omen have effectively brought about a positive change in the speaker's mood.

### Poetic devices:

- i) **Enjambment:** each line runs into the next
- ii) **Alliteration:** has given my hear  
Saved some part.

### Thinking about the poem:

1. **What is a dust of snow? What does the poet say has changed in his mood? How has the poet's mood changed?**  
'Dust of snow' refers to fine snow particles.  
The dust of snow that lands on him due to the action of a crow, while he was standing under a hemlock tree, has changed his mood.  
The poet, who was depressed at having rued his day, suddenly becomes joyful.
2. **How does Frost present nature in this poem? (100-150) The following questions may help you to think of an answer.**
  - i) **What are the birds that are usually named in poems? Do you think the crow is often mentioned in poems? What image comes to your mind when you think of a crow?**

- ii) Again, what is a 'hemlock tree'? Why doesn't the poet write about a more beautiful tree such as a maple, or an oak, or a pine?
- iii) What do the 'crow' and 'hemlock' represent- joy or sorrow? What does the dust of snow that the crow shakes off a hemlock tree stand for?

Robert Frost has presented nature in an unconventional way in his poem 'Dust of Snow'. Poets usually write about birds that appeal to the senses: birds that are beautiful, or birds that sing melodiously like the peacock, parrot, nightingale, cuckoo and so on. The crow is rarely mentioned in poems, as it has a negative image and is associated with darkness and doom. It usually symbolises bad luck and death. Similarly, a hemlock tree also represents death and destruction. Instead of writing about more beautiful trees like maple, or oak or pine, the poet uses the image of the hemlock tree as a reflection of his depressed state of mind.

In contrast to the crow and hemlock that represent sorrow, the dust of snow symbolises joy and hope. The dust of snow that falls on the speaker brings about a positive change in his mood. It is however, ironic that the snow that represents positive energy and joy happens to be on the hemlock tree and that it was shaken off by a crow.

**Extract based Questions:**

1. *"Has given my heart  
A change of mood  
And saved some part  
Of a day I had rued.*

**a) Where was the speaker standing?**

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| i). under an oak tree | ii) under a hemlock tree |
| iii) under a bridge   | iv) under a maple tree   |

Ans) (ii)

**b) What has given the poet's heart a change of mood?**

- |                               |                        |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| i). the beautiful scenery     | ii) the dust of snow   |
| iii). The meeting of a friend | iv) none of the above. |

**c) Who shook the snow on the speaker?**

- |               |                       |
|---------------|-----------------------|
| i). the wind  | ii) the crow          |
| iii) the rain | iv) both (i) and (ii) |

Ans) (ii)

**d) The poet is \_\_\_\_\_ ( Robert Frost)**