

THE FIRST SNOWFALL

James Russell Lowell

The snow had begun in the gloaming,¹
And busily all the night
Had been heaping field and highway
With a silence deep and white.

5 Every pine and fir and hemlock
Wore ermine² too dear for an earl,
And the poorest twig on the elm tree
Was ridged inch deep with pearl.

From sheds new-roofed with Carrara³
10 Came Chanticleer's⁴ muffled crow,
The stiff rails softened to swan's-down,
And still fluttered down the snow.

I stood and watched by the window
The noiseless work of the sky,
15 And the sudden flurries of snowbirds,
Like brown leaves whirling by. **H**

I thought of a mound in sweet Auburn⁵
Where a little headstone stood;
How the flakes were folding it gently,
20 As did robins the babes in the wood. **I**

Up spoke our own little Mabel,
Saying, "Father, who makes it snow?"
And I told of the good All-father
Who cares for us here below.

H MOOD

Reread lines 1–16. How would you describe the mood created by the poet's use of **rhyme** and **meter**? Explain your answer.

I PARAPHRASE

Paraphrase lines 17–20. How does the mood shift in these lines?

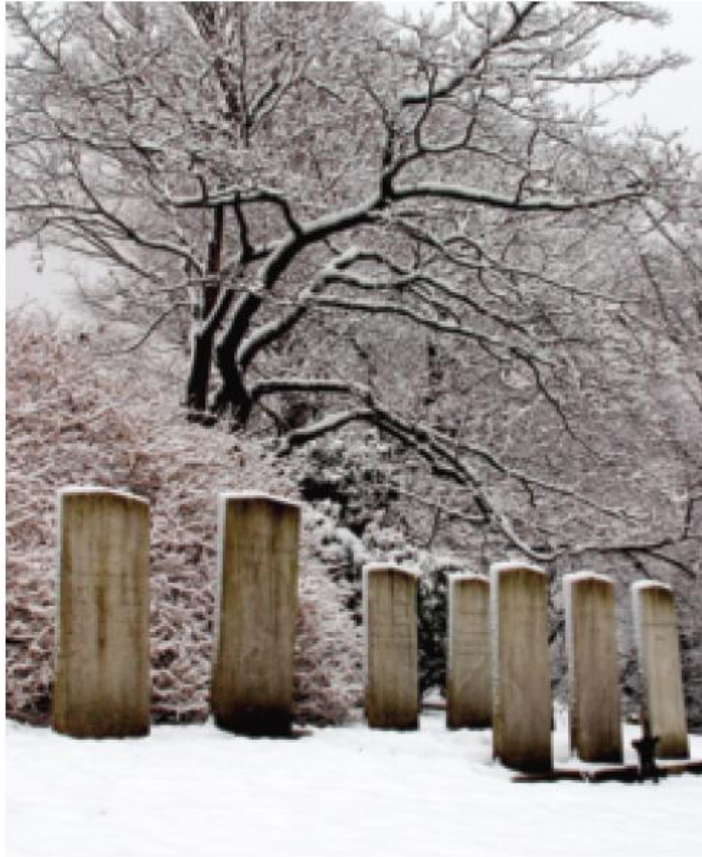
1. **gloaming**: twilight.

2. **ermine**: the expensive white fur of a type of weasel.

3. **Carrara**: Carrara marble, a white marble named after the Italian city where it is mined.

4. **Chanticleer's**: a rooster's.

5. **Auburn**: Mount Auburn Cemetery, located in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



ANALYZE VISUALS

This photograph shows Mount Auburn Cemetery, which is mentioned in the poem. What mood is suggested by the photograph, what details support the mood, and how does the mood of the picture match that of the poem?

25 Again I looked at the snowfall,
 And thought of the leaden sky
 That arched o'er our first great sorrow,
 When that mound was heaped so high. **J**

I remembered the gradual patience
 30 That fell from that cloud like snow,
 Flake by flake, healing and hiding
 The scar that renewed our woe.

And again to the child I whispered,
 "The snow that husheth all,
 35 Darling, the merciful Father
 Alone can make it fall!" **K**

Then, with eyes that saw not, I kissed her;
 And she, kissing back, could not know
 That *my* kiss was given to her sister,
 40 Folded close under deepening snow.

J MAKE INFERENCES

In line 17, "mound" refers to the daughter's grave. What else does "mound" refer to in line 28?

K MOOD

What mood does the speaker create at the end of the poem by invoking the "merciful Father"?