**Love and a Question**

*Robert Frost*

1913

A Stranger came to the door at eve,

   And he spoke the bridegroom fair.

He bore a green-white stick in his hand,

   And, for all burden, care.

He asked with the eyes more than the lips  5

   For a shelter for the night,

And he turned and looked at the road afar

   Without a window light.

The bridegroom came forth into the porch

   With, ‘Let us look at the sky,  10

And question what of the night to be,

   Stranger, you and I.’

The woodbine leaves littered the yard,

   The woodbine berries were blue,

Autumn, yes, winter was in the wind;  15

   ‘Stranger, I wish I knew.’

Within, the bride in the dusk alone

   Bent over the open fire,

Her face rose-red with the glowing coal

   And the thought of the heart’s desire.  20

The bridegroom looked at the weary road,

   Yet saw but her within,

And wished her heart in a case of gold

   And pinned with a silver pin.

The bridegroom thought it little to give  25

   A dole of bread, a purse,

A heartfelt prayer for the poor of God,

   Or for the rich a curse;

But whether or not a man was asked

   To mar the love of two  30

By harboring woe in the bridal house,

   The bridegroom wished he knew.

**After Apple-picking**

*Robert Frost*

1914

MY long two-pointed ladder’s sticking through a tree

Toward heaven still,

And there’s a barrel that I didn’t fill

Beside it, and there may be two or three

Apples I didn’t pick upon some bough.5

But I am done with apple-picking now.

Essence of winter sleep is on the night,

The scent of apples: I am drowsing off.

I cannot rub the strangeness from my sight

I got from looking through a pane of glass 10

I skimmed this morning from the drinking trough

And held against the world of hoary grass.

It melted, and I let it fall and break.

But I was well

Upon my way to sleep before it fell, 15

And I could tell

What form my dreaming was about to take.

Magnified apples appear and disappear,

Stem end and blossom end,

And every fleck of russet showing clear. 20

My instep arch not only keeps the ache,

It keeps the pressure of a ladder-round.

**Mending Wall**

*Robert Frost*

1914

SOMETHING there is that doesn't love a wall,

That sends the frozen-ground-swell under it,

And spills the upper boulders in the sun;

And makes gaps even two can pass abreast.

The work of hunters is another thing: *5*

I have come after them and made repair

Where they have left not one stone on stone,

But they would have the rabbit out of hiding,

To please the yelping dogs. The gaps I mean,

No one has seen them made or heard them made, *10*

But at spring mending-time we find them there.

I let my neighbor know beyond the hill;

And on a day we meet to walk the line

And set the wall between us once again.

We keep the wall between us as we go. *15*

To each the boulders that have fallen to each.

And some are loaves and some so nearly balls

We have to use a spell to make them balance:

"Stay where you are until our backs are turned!"

We wear our fingers rough with handling them. *20*

Oh, just another kind of outdoor game,

One on a side. It comes to little more:

He is all pine and I am apple-orchard.

My apple trees will never get across

And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him. *25*

He only says, "Good fences make good neighbors."

Spring is the mischief in me, and I wonder

If I could put a notion in his head:

*"Why* do they make good neighbors? Isn't it

Where there are cows? But here there are no cows. *30*

Before I built a wall I'd ask to know

What I was walling in or walling out,

And to whom I was like to give offence.

Something there is that doesn't love a wall,

That wants it down!" I could say "Elves" to him, *35*

But it's not elves exactly, and I'd rather

He said it for himself. I see him there,

Bringing a stone grasped firmly by the top

In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.

He moves in darkness as it seems to me, *40*

Not of woods only and the shade of trees.

He will not go behind his father's saying,

And he likes having thought of it so well

He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

**The Road Not Taken**

*by Robert Frost*

1916

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth; 5  
  
Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same, 10  
  
And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back. 15  
  
I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-  
I took the one less traveled by, 20  
And that has made all the difference.

**Birches**

*Robert Frost*

1916

When I see birches bend to left and right  
Across the lines of straighter darker trees,  
I like to think some boy's been swinging them.  
But swinging doesn't bend them down to stay.  
Ice-storms do that. Often you must have seen them 5  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-colored  
As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells 10  
Shattering and avalanching on the snow-crust--  
Such heaps of broken glass to sweep away  
You'd think the inner dome of heaven had fallen.  
They are dragged to the withered bracken by the load,  
And they seem not to break; though once they are bowed 15  
So low for long, they never right themselves:  
You may see their trunks arching in the woods  
Years afterwards, trailing their leaves on the ground  
Like girls on hands and knees that throw their hair  
Before them over their heads to dry in the sun. 20  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter-of-fact about the ice-storm  
(Now am I free to be poetical?)  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows-- 25  
Some boy too far from town to learn baseball,  
Whose only play was what he found himself,  
Summer or winter, and could play alone.  
One by one he subdued his father's trees  
By riding them down over and over again 30  
Until he took the stiffness out of them,  
And not one but hung limp, not one was left  
For him to conquer. He learned all there was  
To learn about not launching out too soon  
And so not carrying the tree away 35  
Clear to the ground. He always kept his poise  
To the top branches, climbing carefully  
With the same pains you use to fill a cup  
Up to the brim, and even above the brim.  
Then he flung outward, feet first, with a swish, 40  
Kicking his way down through the air to the ground.  
So was I once myself a swinger of birches.  
And so I dream of going back to be.  
It's when I'm weary of considerations,  
And life is too much like a pathless wood 45  
Where your face burns and tickles with the cobwebs  
Broken across it, and one eye is weeping  
From a twig's having lashed across it open.  
I'd like to get away from earth awhile  
And then come back to it and begin over. 50  
May no fate willfully misunderstand me  
And half grant what I wish and snatch me away  
Not to return. Earth's the right place for love:  
I don't know where it's likely to go better.  
I'd like to go by climbing a birch tree, 55  
And climb black branches up a snow-white trunk  
Toward heaven, till the tree could bear no more,  
But dipped its top and set me down again.  
That would be good both going and coming back.  
One could do worse than be a swinger of birches. 60

**'OUT, OUT--'**

*Robert Frost*

1916

The buzz-saw snarled and rattled in the yard  
And made dust and dropped stove-length sticks of wood,  
Sweet-scented stuff when the breeze drew across it.  
And from there those that lifted eyes could count  
Five mountain ranges one behind the other 5  
Under the sunset far into Vermont.  
And the saw snarled and rattled, snarled and rattled,  
As it ran light, or had to bear a load.  
And nothing happened: day was all but done.  
Call it a day, I wish they might have said 10  
To please the boy by giving him the half hour  
That a boy counts so much when saved from work.  
His sister stood beside them in her apron  
To tell them 'Supper'. At the word, the saw,  
As if to prove saws knew what supper meant, 15  
Leaped out at the boy's hand, or seemed to leap--  
He must have given the hand. However it was,  
Neither refused the meeting. But the hand!  
The boy's first outcry was a rueful laugh.

As he swung toward them holding up the hand 20  
Half in appeal, but half as if to keep  
The life from spilling. Then the boy saw all--  
Since he was old enough to know, big boy  
Doing a man's work, though a child at heart--  
He saw all spoiled. 'Don't let him cut my hand off 25  
The doctor, when he comes. Don't let him, sister!'  
So. But the hand was gone already.

The doctor put him in the dark of ether.  
He lay and puffed his lips out with his breath.  
And then -- the watcher at his pulse took fright. 30

No one believed. They listened at his heart.  
Little -- less -- nothing! -- and that ended it.  
No more to build on there. And they, since they  
Were not the one dead, turned to their affairs.

**An Old Man’s Winter Night**

*Robert Frost*

1916

All out of doors looked darkly in at him

Through the thin frost, almost in separate stars,

That gathers on the pane in empty rooms.

What kept his eyes from giving back the gaze

Was the lamp tilted near them in his hand. 5

What kept him from remembering what it was

That brought him to that creaking room was age.

He stood with barrels round him—at a loss.

And having scared the cellar under him

In clomping there, he scared it once again 10

In clomping off;—and scared the outer night,

Which has its sounds, familiar, like the roar

Of trees and crack of branches, common things,

But nothing so like beating on a box.

A light he was to no one but himself 15

Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,

A quiet light, and then not even that.

He consigned to the moon,—such as she was,

So late-arising,—to the broken moon

As better than the sun in any case 20

For such a charge, his snow upon the roof,

His icicles along the wall to keep;

And slept. The log that shifted with a jolt

Once in the stove, disturbed him and he shifted,

And eased his heavy breathing, but still slept. 25

One aged man—one man—can’t fill a house,

A farm, a countryside, or if he can,

It’s thus he does it of a winter night.

**Bond and Free**

[*Robert Frost*](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/192)

1916

Love has earth to which she clings

With hills and circling arms about—

Wall within wall to shut fear out.

But Thought has need of no such things,

For Thought has a pair of dauntless wings. 5

On snow and sand and turf, I see

Where Love has left a printed trace

With straining in the world’s embrace.

And such is Love and glad to be.

But Thought has shaken his ankles free. 10

Thought cleaves the interstellar gloom

And sits in Sirius’ disc all night,

Till day makes him retrace his flight,

With smell of burning on every plume,

Back past the sun to an earthly room. 15

His gains in heaven are what they are.

Yet some say Love by being thrall

And simply staying possesses all

In several beauty that Thought fares far

To find fused in another star. 20

**Carpe Diem**

[*Robert Frost*](http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/192)

*1916*

Age saw two quiet children

Go loving by at twilight,

He knew not whether homeward,

Or outward from the village,

Or (chimes were ringing) churchward, 5

He waited (they were strangers)

Till they were out of hearing

To bid them both be happy.

"Be happy, happy, happy,

And seize the day of pleasure." 10

The age-long theme is Age's.

'Twas Age imposed on poems

Their gather-roses burden

To warn against the danger

That overtaken lovers 15

From being overflooded

With happiness should have it.

And yet not know they have it.

But bid life seize the present?

It lives less in the present 20

Than in the future always,

And less in both together

Than in the past. The present

Is too much for the senses,

Too crowding, too confusing— 25

Too present to imagine.

**Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening**

*Robert Frost*

1923

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village though;

He will not see me stopping here

To watch his woods fill up with snow.

My little horse must think it queer 5

To stop without a farmhouse near

Between the woods and frozen lake

The darkest evening of the year.

He gives his harness bells a shake

To ask if there is some mistake. 10

The only other sound's the sweep

Of easy wind and downy flake.

The woods are lovely, dark, and deep.

But I have promises to keep,

And miles to go before I sleep, 15

And miles to go before I sleep.

## A BROOK IN THE CITY

*Robert Frost*

1923

The farmhouse lingers, though averse to square  
With the new city street it has to wear

A number in. But what about the brook

That held the house as in an elbow-crook?  
I ask as one who knew the brook, its strength 5

And impulse, having dipped a finger length  
And made it leap my knuckle, having tossed  
A flower to try its currents where they crossed.  
The meadow grass could be cemented down  
From growing under pavements of a town; 10  
The apple trees be sent to hearth-stone flame.  
Is water wood to serve a brook the same?  
How else dispose of an immortal force  
No longer needed? Staunch it at its source  
With cinder loads dumped down? The brook was thrown 15

Deep in a sewer dungeon under stone  
In fetid darkness still to live and run –   
And all for nothing it had ever done  
Except forget to go in fear perhaps.  
No one would know except for ancient maps 20  
That such a brook ran water. But I wonder   
If from its being kept forever under  
The thoughts may not have risen that so keep  
This new-built city from both work and sleep.

**A Young Birch**

*Robert Frost*

1946

The birch begins to crack its outer sheath

Of baby green and show the white beneath,

As whosoever likes the young and slight

May well have noticed. Soon entirely white

To double day and cut in half the dark 5

It will stand forth, entirely white in bark,

And nothing but the top a leafy green—

The only native tree that dares to lean,

Relying on its beauty, to the air.

(Less brave perhaps than trusting are the fair.) 10

And someone reminiscent will recall

How once in cutting brush along the wall

He spared it from the number of the slain,

At first to be no bigger than a cane,

And then no bigger than a fishing pole,  15

But now at last so obvious a bole

The most efficient help you ever hired

Would know that it was there to be admired,

And zeal would not be thanked that cut it down

When you were reading books or out of town. 20

It was a thing of beauty and was sent

To live its life out as an ornament.