

THE POETRY  
OF  
ROBERT FROST

THE COLLECTED POEMS

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## MENDING WALL

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 a 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:  
There where it is we do not need the wall:  
He is all pine and I am apple orchard.  
My apple trees will never get across 25  
And eat the cones under his pines, I tell him.  
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  
 30 Where there are cows? But here there are no cows.  
 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 offense.  
 35 Something there is that doesn't love a wall,  
 That wants it down." I could say "Elves" to him,  
 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  
 40 In each hand, like an old-stone savage armed.  
 He moves in darkness as it seems to me,  
 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  
 45 He says again, "Good fences make good neighbors."

### THE DEATH OF THE HIRED MAN

Mary sat musing on the lamp-flame at the table,  
 Waiting for Warren. When she heard his step,  
 She ran on tiptoe down the darkened passage  
 To meet him in the doorway with the news  
 And put him on his guard. "Silas is back."  
 5 She pushed him outward with her through the door  
 And shut it after her. "Be kind," she said.  
 She took the market things from Warren's arms  
 And set them on the porch, then drew him down  
 10 To sit beside her on the wooden steps.  
 "When was I ever anything but kind to him?"

But I'll not have the fellow back," he said.  
 "I told him so last haying, didn't I?  
 If he left then, I said, that ended it.  
 What good is he? Who else will harbor him  
 15 At his age for the little he can do?  
 What help he is there's no depending on.  
 Off he goes always when I need him most.  
 He thinks he ought to earn a little pay,  
 20 Enough at least to buy tobacco with,  
 So he won't have to beg and be beholden.  
 'All right,' I say, 'I can't afford to pay  
 Any fixed wages, though I wish I could.'  
 'Someone else can.' 'Then someone else will have to.'  
 25 I shouldn't mind his bettering himself  
 If that was what it was. You can be certain,  
 When he begins like that, there's someone at him  
 Trying to coax him off with pocket money—  
 In haying time, when any help is scarce.  
 30 In winter he comes back to us. I'm done."

"Sh! not so loud: he'll hear you," Mary said.

"I want him to: he'll have to soon or late."

"He's worn out. He's asleep beside the stove.  
 When I came up from Rowe's I found him here,  
 35 Huddled against the barn door fast asleep,  
 A miserable sight, and frightening, too—  
 You needn't smile—I didn't recognize him—  
 I wasn't looking for him—and he's changed.  
 Wait till you see."

"Where did you say he'd been?"

"He didn't say. I dragged him to the house," 40

And gave him tea and tried to make him smoke.  
I tried to make him talk about his travels.  
Nothing would do: he just kept nodding off."

"What did he say? Did he say anything?"

"But little."

"Anything? Mary, confess  
He said he'd come to ditch the meadow for me."

"Warren!"

"But did he? I just want to know."

"Of course he did. What would you have him say?  
Surely you wouldn't grudge the poor old man  
Some humble way to save his self-respect.  
He added, if you really care to know,  
He meant to clear the upper pasture, too.  
That sounds like something you have heard before?  
Warren, I wish you could have heard the way  
He jumbled everything. I stopped to look  
Two or three times—he made me feel so queer—  
To see if he was talking in his sleep.  
He ran on Harold Wilson—you remember—  
The boy you had in haying four years since.  
He's finished school, and teaching in his college.  
Silas declares you'll have to get him back.  
He says they two will make a team for work:  
Between them they will lay this farm as smooth!  
The way he mixed that in with other things.  
He thinks young Wilson a likely lad, though daft  
On education—you know how they fought  
All through July under the blazing sun,  
Silas up on the cart to build the load,

Harold along beside to pitch it on."

"Yes, I took care to keep well out of earshot." 70

"Well, those days trouble Silas like a dream.  
You wouldn't think they would. How some things linger!  
Harold's young college-boy's assurance piqued him.

After so many years he still keeps finding  
Good arguments he sees he might have used. 75

I sympathize. I know just how it feels  
To think of the right thing to say too late.  
Harold's associated in his mind with Latin.  
He asked me what I thought of Harold's saying  
He studied Latin, like the violin, 80

Because he liked it—that an argument!  
He said he couldn't make the boy believe  
He could find water with a hazel prong—  
Which showed how much good school had ever done him.  
He wanted to go over that. But most of all 85  
He thinks if he could have another chance  
To teach him how to build a load of hay——"

"I know, that's Silas' one accomplishment.  
He bundles every forkful in its place,  
And tags and numbers it for future reference, 90  
So he can find and easily dislodge it  
In the unloading. Silas does that well.  
He takes it out in bunches like big birds' nests.  
You never see him standing on the hay  
He's trying to lift, straining to lift himself." 95

"He thinks if he could teach him that, he'd be  
Some good perhaps to someone in the world.  
He hates to see a boy the fool of books.  
Poor Silas, so concerned for other folk,

And nothing to look backward to with pride,  
And nothing to look forward to with hope,  
So now and never any different." 100

Part of a moon was falling down the west,  
Dragging the whole sky with it to the hills.  
Its light poured softly in her lap. She saw it 105  
And spread her apron to it. She put out her hand  
Among the harplike morning-glory strings,  
Taut with the dew from garden bed to eaves,  
As if she played unheard some tenderness  
That wrought on him beside her in the night. 110  
"Warren," she said, "he has come home to die:  
You needn't be afraid he'll leave you this time."  
"Home," he mocked gently.

"Yes, what else but home?  
It all depends on what you mean by home.  
Of course he's nothing to us, any more 115  
Than was the hound that came a stranger to us  
Out of the woods, worn out upon the trail."  
"Home is the place where, when you have to go there,  
They have to take you in."

"I should have called it  
Something you somehow haven't to deserve." 120  
Warren leaned out and took a step or two,  
Picked up a little stick, and brought it back  
And broke it in his hand and tossed it by.  
"Silas has better claim on us you think  
Than on his brother? Thirteen little miles 125  
As the road winds would bring him to his door.  
Silas has walked that far no doubt today.

Why doesn't he go there? His brother's rich,  
A somebody—director in the bank."

"He never told us that."

"We know it, though." 130

"I think his brother ought to help, of course.  
I'll see to that if there is need. He ought of right  
To take him in, and might be willing to—  
He may be better than appearances.  
But have some pity on Silas. Do you think 135  
If he had any pride in claiming kin  
Or anything he looked for from his brother,  
He'd keep so still about him all this time?"  
"I wonder what's between them."

"I can tell you.  
Silas is what he is—we wouldn't mind him— 140  
But just the kind that kinsfolk can't abide.  
He never did a thing so very bad.  
He don't know why he isn't quite as good  
As anybody. Worthless though he is,  
He won't be made ashamed to please his brother." 145  
"I can't think Si ever hurt anyone."

"No, but he hurt my heart the way he lay  
And rolled his old head on that sharp-edged chair-back.  
He wouldn't let me put him on the lounge.  
You must go in and see what you can do. 150  
I made the bed up for him there tonight.  
You'll be surprised at him—how much he's broken.  
His working days are done; I'm sure of it."  
"I'd not be in a hurry to say that."

"I haven't been. Go, look, see for yourself. 155  
But, Warren, please remember how it is:  
He's come to help you ditch the meadow.  
He has a plan. You mustn't laugh at him.  
He may not speak of it, and then he may.  
I'll sit and see if that small sailing cloud 160  
Will hit or miss the moon."

It hit the moon.  
Then there were three there, making a dim row,  
The moon, the little silver cloud, and she.  
Warren returned—too soon, it seemed to her—  
Slipped to her side, caught up her hand and waited. 165  
"Warren?" she questioned.

"Dead," was all he answered.

## THE MOUNTAIN

The mountain held the town as in a shadow.  
I saw so much before I slept there once:  
I noticed that I missed stars in the west,  
Where its black body cut into the sky.  
Near me it seemed: I felt it like a wall 5  
Behind which I was sheltered from a wind.  
And yet between the town and it I found,  
When I walked forth at dawn to see new things,  
Were fields, a river, and beyond, more fields.  
The river at the time was fallen away, 10  
And made a widespread brawl on cobblestones;  
But the signs showed what it had done in spring:  
Good grassland gullied out, and in the grass  
Ridges of sand, and driftwood stripped of bark.

150 He shut the door.  
The Doctor slid a little down the pillow.

## HOME BURIAL

155 He saw her from the bottom of the stairs  
Before she saw him. She was starting down,  
Looking back over her shoulder at some fear.  
She took a doubtful step and then undid it  
To raise herself and look again. He spoke 5  
Advancing toward her: "What is it you see  
From up there always?—for I want to know."  
160 She turned and sank upon her skirts at that,  
And her face changed from terrified to dull.  
He said to gain time: "What is it you see?" 10  
Mounting until she cowered under him.  
"I will find out now—you must tell me, dear."  
65 She, in her place, refused him any help,  
With the least stiffening of her neck and silence.  
She let him look, sure that he wouldn't see, 15  
Blind creature; and awhile he didn't see.  
But at last he murmured, "Oh," and again, "Oh."  
"What is it—what?" she said.  
70 "Just that I see."  
"You don't," she challenged. "Tell me what it is."  
"The wonder is I didn't see at once. 20  
I never noticed it from here before.  
I must be wonted to it—that's the reason.  
75 The little graveyard where my people are!  
So small the window frames the whole of it.  
Not so much larger than a bedroom, is it? 25

There are three stones of slate and one of marble,  
Broad-shouldered little slabs there in the sunlight  
On the sidehill. We haven't to mind *those*.  
But I understand: it is not the stones,  
But the child's mound——"

"Don't, don't, don't,  
don't," she cried.

She withdrew, shrinking from beneath his arm  
That rested on the banister, and slid downstairs;  
And turned on him with such a daunting look,  
He said twice over before he knew himself:  
"Can't a man speak of his own child he's lost?"

"Not you!—Oh, where's my hat? Oh, I don't need it!  
I must get out of here. I must get air.—  
I don't know rightly whether any man can."

"Amy! Don't go to someone else this time.  
Listen to me. I won't come down the stairs."  
He sat and fixed his chin between his fists.  
"There's something I should like to ask you, dear."

"You don't know how to ask it."

"Help me, then."

Her fingers moved the latch for all reply.

"My words are nearly always an offense.  
I don't know how to speak of anything  
So as to please you. But I might be taught,  
I should suppose. I can't say I see how.  
A man must partly give up being a man  
With womenfolk. We could have some arrangement  
By which I'd bind myself to keep hands off

Anything special you're a-mind to name.  
Though I don't like such things 'twixt those that love.  
Two that don't love can't live together without them.  
But two that do can't live together with them."  
She moved the latch a little. "Don't—don't go.  
Don't carry it to someone else this time.  
Tell me about it if it's something human.  
Let me into your grief. I'm not so much  
Unlike other folks as your standing there  
Apart would make me out. Give me my chance.  
I do think, though, you overdo it a little.  
What was it brought you up to think it the thing  
To take your mother-loss of a first child  
So inconsolably—in the face of love.  
You'd think his memory might be satisfied——"  
"There you go sneering now!"

"I'm not, I'm not!"  
You make me angry. I'll come down to you.  
God, what a woman! And it's come to this,  
A man can't speak of his own child that's dead."  
"You can't because you don't know how to speak.  
If you had any feelings, you that dug  
With your own hand—how could you?—his little grave;  
I saw you from that very window there,  
Making the gravel leap and leap in air,  
Leap up, like that, like that, and land so lightly  
And roll back down the mound beside the hole.  
I thought, Who is that man? I didn't know you.  
And I crept down the stairs and up the stairs  
To look again, and still your spade kept lifting.  
Then you came in. I heard your rumbling voice



Out in the kitchen, and I don't know why,  
But I went near to see with my own eyes.  
You could sit there with the stains on your shoes  
Of the fresh earth from your own baby's grave 85  
And talk about your everyday concerns.  
You had stood the spade up against the wall  
Outside there in the entry, for I saw it."

"I shall laugh the worst laugh I ever laughed.  
I'm cursed. God, if I don't believe I'm cursed." 90

"I can repeat the very words you were saying:  
'Three foggy mornings and one rainy day  
Will rot the best birch fence a man can build.'  
Think of it, talk like that at such a time!  
What had how long it takes a birch to rot 95  
To do with what was in the darkened parlor?  
You *couldn't* care! The nearest friends can go  
With anyone to death, comes so far short  
They might as well not try to go at all.  
No, from the time when one is sick to death, 100  
One is alone, and he dies more alone.

Friends make pretense of following to the grave,  
But before one is in it, their minds are turned  
And making the best of their way back to life  
And living people, and things they understand. 105  
But the world's evil. I won't have grief so  
If I can change it. Oh, I won't, I won't!"

"There, you have said it all and you feel better.  
You won't go now. You're crying. Close the door.  
The heart's gone out of it: why keep it up? 110  
Amy! There's someone coming down the road!"

"You—oh, you think the talk is all. I must go—

And the sun shines out warm: the vines must be wet.  
 It's so long since I picked I almost forget  
 How we used to pick berries: we took one look round, 85  
 Then sank out of sight like trolls underground,  
 And saw nothing more of each other, or heard,  
 Unless when you said I was keeping a bird  
 Away from its nest, and I said it was you.  
 'Well, one of us is.' For complaining it flew 90  
 Around and around us. And then for a while  
 We picked, till I feared you had wandered a mile,  
 And I thought I had lost you. I lifted a shout  
 Too loud for the distance you were, it turned out,  
 For when you made answer, your voice was as low 95  
 As talking—you stood up beside me, you know."

"We shan't have the place to ourselves to enjoy—  
 Not likely, when all the young Lorens deploy.  
 They'll be there tomorrow, or even tonight.  
 They won't be too friendly—they may be polite— 100  
 To people they look on as having no right  
 To pick where they're picking. But we won't complain.  
 You ought to have seen how it looked in the rain,  
 The fruit mixed with water in layers of leaves,  
 Like two kinds of jewels, a vision for thieves." 105

### A SERVANT TO SERVANTS

I didn't make you know how glad I was  
 To have you come and camp here on our land.  
 I promised myself to get down some day  
 And see the way you lived, but I don't know!  
 With a houseful of hungry men to feed 5  
 I guess you'd find. . . . It seems to me

I can't express my feelings, any more  
 Than I can raise my voice or want to lift  
 My hand (oh, I can lift it when I have to). 10  
 Did ever you feel so? I hope you never.  
 It's got so I don't even know for sure  
 Whether I *am* glad, sorry, or anything.  
 There's nothing but a voice-like left inside  
 That seems to tell me how I ought to feel, 15  
 And would feel if I wasn't all gone wrong.  
 You take the lake. I look and look at it.  
 I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.  
 I stand and make myself repeat out loud  
 The advantages it has, so long and narrow, 20  
 Like a deep piece of some old running river  
 Cut short off at both ends. It lies five miles  
 Straightaway through the mountain notch  
 From the sink window where I wash the plates,  
 And all our storms come up toward the house, 25  
 Drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter.  
 It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuit  
 To step outdoors and take the water dazzle  
 A sunny morning, or take the rising wind  
 About my face and body and through my wrapper, 30  
 When a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den,  
 And a cold chill shivered across the lake.  
 I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water,  
 Our Willoughby! How did you hear of it?  
 I expect, though, everyone's heard of it. 35  
 In a book about ferns? Listen to that!  
 You let things more like feathers regulate  
 Your going and coming. And you like it here?  
 I can see how you might. But I don't know!  
 It would be different if more people came,

For then there would be business. As it is,  
 The cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them,  
 Sometimes we don't. We've a good piece of shore  
 That ought to be worth something, and may yet.  
 But I don't count on it as much as Len.  
 He looks on the bright side of everything,  
 Including me. He thinks I'll be all right  
 With doctoring. But it's not medicine—  
 Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—  
 It's rest I want—there, I have said it out—  
 From cooking meals for hungry hired men  
 And washing dishes after them—from doing  
 Things over and over that just won't stay done.  
 By good rights I ought not to have so much  
 Put on me, but there seems no other way.  
 Len says one steady pull more ought to do it.  
 He says the best way out is always through.  
 And I agree to that, or in so far  
 As that I can see no way out but through—  
 Leastways for me—and then they'll be convinced.  
 It's not that Len don't want the best for me.  
 It was his plan our moving over in  
 Beside the lake from where that day I showed you  
 We used to live—ten miles from anywhere.  
 We didn't change without some sacrifice,  
 But Len went at it to make up the loss.  
 His work's a man's, of course, from sun to sun,  
 But he works when he works as hard as I do—  
 Though there's small profit in comparisons.  
 (Women and men will make them all the same.)  
 But work ain't all. Len undertakes too much.  
 He's into everything in town. This year  
 It's highways, and he's got too many men

Around him to look after that make waste.  
 They take advantage of him shamefully,  
 And proud, too, of themselves for doing so. 75  
 We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings,  
 Sprawling about the kitchen with their talk  
 While I fry their bacon. Much they care!  
 No more put out in what they do or say  
 Than if I wasn't in the room at all. 80  
 Coming and going all the time, they are:  
 I don't learn what their names are, let alone  
 Their characters, or whether they are safe  
 To have inside the house with doors unlocked.  
 I'm not afraid of them, though, if they're not 85  
 Afraid of me. There's two can play at that.  
 I have my fancies: it runs in the family.  
 My father's brother wasn't right. They kept him  
 Locked up for years back there at the old farm.  
 I've been away once—yes, I've been away. 90  
 The State Asylum. I was prejudiced;  
 I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there;  
 You know the old idea—the only asylum  
 Was the poorhouse, and those who could afford,  
 Rather than send their folks to such a place, 95  
 Kept them at home; and it does seem more human.  
 But it's not so: the place is the asylum.  
 There they have every means proper to do with,  
 And you aren't darkening other people's lives—  
 Worse than no good to them, and they no good 100  
 To you in your condition; you can't know  
 Affection or the want of it in that state.  
 I've heard too much of the old-fashioned way.  
 My father's brother, he went mad quite young.  
 Some thought he had been bitten by a dog, 105

Because his violence took on the form  
 Of carrying his pillow in his teeth;  
 But it's more likely he was crossed in love,  
 Or so the story goes. It was some girl.  
 Anyway all he talked about was love.  
 They soon saw he would do someone a mischief  
 If he wa'n't kept strict watch of, and it ended  
 In father's building him a sort of cage,  
 Or room within a room, of hickory poles,  
 Like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling—  
 A narrow passage all the way around.  
 Anything they put in for furniture  
 He'd tear to pieces, even a bed to lie on.  
 So they made the place comfortable with straw,  
 Like a beast's stall, to ease their consciences.  
 Of course they had to feed him without dishes.  
 They tried to keep him clothed, but he paraded  
 With his clothes on his arm—all of his clothes.  
 Cruel—it sounds. I s'pose they did the best  
 They knew. And just when he was at the height,  
 Father and mother married, and mother came,  
 A bride, to help take care of such a creature,  
 And accommodate her young life to his.  
 That was what marrying father meant to her.  
 She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful  
 By his shouts in the night. He'd shout and shout  
 Until the strength was shouted out of him,  
 And his voice died down slowly from exhaustion.  
 He'd pull his bars apart like bow and bowstring,  
 And let them go and make them twang, until  
 His hands had worn them smooth as any oxbow.  
 And then he'd crow as if he thought that child's play—  
 The only fun he had. I've heard them say, though,

They found a way to put a stop to it.  
 He was before my time—I never saw him;  
 But the pen stayed exactly as it was,  
 There in the upper chamber in the ell,  
 A sort of catchall full of attic clutter.  
 I often think of the smooth hickory bars.  
 It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—  
 "It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail"—  
 Just as you will till it becomes a habit.  
 No wonder I was glad to get away.  
 Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.  
 I didn't want the blame if things went wrong.  
 I was glad though, no end, when we moved out,  
 And I looked to be happy, and I was,  
 As I said, for a while—but I don't know!  
 Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.  
 And there's more to it than just window views  
 And living by a lake. I'm past such help—  
 Unless Len took the notion, which he won't,  
 And I won't ask him—it's not sure enough.  
 I s'pose I've got to go the road I'm going:  
 Other folks have to, and why shouldn't I?  
 I almost think if I could do like you,  
 Drop everything and live out on the ground—  
 But it might be, come night, I shouldn't like it,  
 Or a long rain. I should soon get enough,  
 And be glad of a good roof overhead.  
 I've lain awake thinking of you, I'll warrant,  
 More than you have yourself, some of these nights.  
 The wonder was the tents weren't snatched away  
 From over you as you lay in your beds.  
 I haven't courage for a risk like that.  
 Bless you, of course you're keeping me from work,

But the thing of it is, I need to *be* kept.  
There's work enough to do—there's always that;  
But behind's behind. The worst that you can do  
Is set me back a little more behind.  
I shan't catch up in this world, anyway.  
I'd *rather* you'd not go unless you must.

#### AFTER APPLE-PICKING

175

And I keep hearing from the cellar bin  
The rumbling sound  
Of load on load of apples coming in.  
For I have had too much  
Of apple-picking: I am overtired  
Of the great harvest I myself desired.  
There were ten thousand thousand fruit to touch,  
Cherish in hand, lift down, and not let fall.  
For all

25

30

"Nowhere but here  
Once more before we meet elsewhere."

"In rain?"

"It ought to be in rain. Sometime in rain. 210  
In rain tomorrow, shall we, if it rains?  
But if we must, in sunshine." So she went.

### THE HOUSEKEEPER

I let myself in at the kitchen door.

"It's you," she said. "I can't get up. Forgive me  
Not answering your knock. I can no more  
Let people in than I can keep them out.  
I'm getting too old for my size, I tell them. 5  
My fingers are about all I've the use of  
So's to take any comfort. I can sew:  
I help out with this beadwork what I can."

"That's a smart pair of pumps you're beading there.  
Who are they for?"

"You mean?—oh, for some miss. 10  
I can't keep track of other people's daughters.  
Lord, if I were to dream of everyone  
Whose shoes I primped to dance in!"

"And where's John?"

"Haven't you seen him? Strange what set you off  
To come to his house when he's gone to yours. 15  
You can't have passed each other. I know what:  
He must have changed his mind and gone to Garland's.  
He won't be long in that case. You can wait.  
Though what good you can be, or anyone—

It's gone so far. You've heard? Estelle's run off." 20

"Yes, what's it all about? When did she go?"

"Two weeks since."

"She's in earnest, it appears."

"I'm sure she won't come back. She's hiding somewhere.

I don't know where myself. John thinks I do.

He thinks I only have to say the word, 25

And she'll come back. But, bless you, I'm her mother—

I can't talk to her, and, Lord, if I could!"

"It will go hard with John. What will he do?

He can't find anyone to take her place."

"Oh, if you ask me that, what *will* he do? 30

He gets some sort of bakeshop meals together,

With me to sit and tell him everything,

What's wanted and how much and where it is.

But when I'm gone—of course I can't stay here:

Estelle's to take me when she's settled down. 35

He and I only hinder one another.

I tell them they can't get me through the door, though:

I've been built in here like a big church organ.

We've been here fifteen years."

"That's a long time

To live together and then pull apart. 40

How do you see him living when you're gone?

Two of you out will leave an empty house."

"I don't just see him living many years,

Left here with nothing but the furniture.

I hate to think of the old place when we're gone, 45

With the brook going by below the yard,

And no one here but hens blowing about.

If he could sell the place, but then, he can't:

No one will ever live on it again.

It's too run down. This is the last of it. 50

What I think he will do, is let things smash.

He'll sort of swear the time away. He's awful!

I never saw a man let family troubles

Make so much difference in his man's affairs.

He's just dropped everything. He's like a child. 55

I blame his being brought up by his mother.

He's got hay down that's been rained on three times.

He hoed a little yesterday for me:

I thought the growing things would do him good.

Something went wrong. I saw him throw the hoe 60

Sky-high with both hands. I can see it now—

Come here—I'll show you—in that apple tree.

That's no way for a man to do at his age:

He's fifty-five, you know, if he's a day."

"Aren't you afraid of him? What's that gun for?" 65

"Oh, that's been there for hawks since chicken-time.

John Hall touch me! Not if he knows his friends.

I'll say that for him, John's no threatener

Like some menfolk. No one's afraid of him;

All is, he's made up his mind not to stand 70

What he has got to stand."

"Where is Estelle?

Couldn't one talk to her? What does she say?

You say you don't know where she is."

"Nor want to!

She thinks if it was bad to live with him,

It must be right to leave him."

“Which is wrong!” 75  
“Yes, but he should have married her.”

“I know.”  
“The strain’s been too much for her all these years:  
I can’t explain it any other way.  
It’s different with a man, at least with John:  
He knows he’s kinder than the run of men. 80  
Better than married ought to be as good  
As married—that’s what he has always said.  
I know the way he’s felt—but all the same!”

“I wonder why he doesn’t marry her  
And end it.”  
“Too late now: she wouldn’t have him. 85  
He’s given her time to think of something else.  
That’s his mistake. The dear knows my interest  
Has been to keep the thing from breaking up.  
This is a good home: I don’t ask for better.  
But when I’ve said, Why shouldn’t they be married? 90  
He’d say, Why should they?—no more words than that.”

“And after all why should they? John’s been fair  
I take it. What was his was always hers.  
There was no quarrel about property.”

“Reason enough, there was no property. 95  
A friend or two as good as own the farm,  
Such as it is. It isn’t worth the mortgage.”

“I mean Estelle has always held the purse.”  
“The rights of that are harder to get at.  
I guess Estelle and I have filled the purse. 100  
’Twas we let him have money; not he us.

John’s a bad farmer. I’m not blaming him.  
Take it year in, year out, he doesn’t make much.  
We came here for a home for me, you know,  
Estelle to do the housework for the board 105  
Of both of us. But look how it turns out:  
She seems to have the housework, and besides,  
Half of the outdoor work, though as for that,  
He’d say she does it more because she likes it.  
You see our pretty things are all outdoors. 110  
Our hens and cows and pigs are always better  
Than folks like us have any business with.  
Farmers around twice as well off as we  
Haven’t as good. They don’t go with the farm.  
One thing you can’t help liking about John, 115  
He’s fond of nice things—too fond, some would say.  
But Estelle don’t complain: she’s like him there.  
She wants our hens to be the best there are.  
You never saw this room before a show,  
Full of lank, shivery, half-drowned birds 120  
In separate coops, having their plumage done.  
The smell of the wet feathers in the heat!  
You spoke of John’s not being safe to stay with.  
You don’t know what a gentle lot we are:  
We wouldn’t hurt a hen! You ought to see us 125  
Moving a flock of hens from place to place.  
We’re not allowed to take them upside down,  
All we can hold together by the legs.  
Two at a time’s the rule, one on each arm,  
No matter how far and how many times 130  
We have to go.”

“You mean that’s John’s idea.”  
“And we live up to it; or I don’t know



What childishness he wouldn't give way to.  
 He manages to keep the upper hand  
 On his own farm. He's boss. But as to hens: 135  
 We fence our flowers in and the hens range.  
 Nothing's too good for them. We say it pays.  
 John likes to tell the offers he has had,  
 Twenty for this cock, twenty-five for that.  
 He never takes the money. If they're worth 140  
 That much to sell, they're worth as much to keep.  
 Bless you, it's all expense, though. Reach me down  
 The little tin box on the cupboard shelf—  
 The upper shelf, the tin box. That's the one.  
 I'll show you. Here you are."

"What's this?"

"A bill— 145  
 For fifty dollars for one Langshang cock—  
 Receipted. And the cock is in the yard."

"Not in a glass case, then?"

"He'd need a tall one:  
 He can eat off a barrel from the ground.  
 He's been in a glass case, as you may say, 150  
 The Crystal Palace, London. He's imported.  
 John bought him, and we paid the bill with beads—  
 Wampum, I call it. Mind, we don't complain.  
 But you see, don't you, we take care of him."

"And like it, too. It makes it all the worse." 155

"It seems as if. And that's not all: he's helpless  
 In ways that I can hardly tell you of.  
 Sometimes he gets possessed to keep accounts  
 To see where all the money goes so fast.

You know how men will be ridiculous. 160  
 But it's just fun the way he gets bedeviled—  
 If he's untidy now, what will he be——?"

"It makes it all the worse. You must be blind."

"Estelle's the one. You needn't talk to me."

"Can't you and I get to the root of it? 165  
 What's the real trouble? What will satisfy her?"

"It's as I say: she's turned from him, that's all."

"But why, when she's well off? Is it the neighbors,  
 Being cut off from friends?"

"We have our friends.  
 That isn't it. Folks aren't afraid of us." 170  
 "She's let it worry her. You stood the strain,  
 And you're her mother."

"But I didn't always.  
 I didn't relish it along at first.  
 But I got wonted to it. And besides—  
 John said I was too old to have grandchildren. 175  
 But what's the use of talking when it's done?  
 She won't come back—it's worse than that—she can't."

"Why do you speak like that? What do you know?  
 What do you mean?—she's done harm to herself?"

"I mean she's married—married someone else." 180  
 "Oho, oho!"

"You don't believe me."  
 "Yes, I do,  
 Only too well. I knew there must be something!

So that was what was back. She's bad, that's all!"

"Bad to get married when she had the chance?" 184

"Nonsense! See what she's done! But who, but who——?"

"Who'd marry her straight out of such a mess?  
Say it right out—no matter for her mother.  
The man was found. I'd better name no names.  
John himself won't imagine who he is."

"Then it's all up. I think I'll get away. 190  
You'll be expecting John. I pity Estelle;  
I suppose she deserves some pity, too.  
You ought to have the kitchen to yourself  
To break it to him. You may have the job."

"You needn't think you're going to get away. 195  
John's almost here. I've had my eye on someone  
Coming down Ryan's Hill. I thought 'twas him.  
Here he is now. This box! Put it away.  
And this bill."

"What's the hurry? He'll unhitch."

"No, he won't, either. He'll just drop the reins 200  
And turn Doll out to pasture, rig and all.  
She won't get far before the wheels hang up  
On something—there's no harm. See, there he is!  
My, but he looks as if he must have heard!"

John threw the door wide but he didn't enter. 205  
"How are you, neighbor? Just the man I'm after.  
Isn't it Hell?" he said. "I want to know.  
Come out here if you want to hear me talk.—  
I'll talk to you, old woman, afterward.—  
I've got some news that maybe isn't news. 210

What are they trying to do to me, these two?"

"Do go along with him and stop his shouting."  
She raised her voice against the closing door:  
"Who wants to hear your news, you—dreadful fool?"

## THE FEAR

A lantern-light from deeper in the barn  
Shone on a man and woman in the door  
And threw their lurching shadows on a house  
Nearby, all dark in every glossy window. 5  
A horse's hoof pawed once the hollow floor,  
And the back of the gig they stood beside  
Moved in a little. The man grasped a wheel.  
The woman spoke out sharply, "Whoa, stand still!—  
I saw it just as plain as a white plate,"  
She said, "as the light on the dashboard ran 10  
Along the bushes at the roadside—a man's face.  
You *must* have seen it too."

"I didn't see it.  
Are you sure——"  
"Yes, I'm sure!"  
"—it was a face?"

"Joel, I'll have to look. I can't go in,  
I can't, and leave a thing like that unsettled. 15  
Doors locked and curtains drawn will make no difference.  
I always have felt strange when we came home  
To the dark house after so long an absence,  
And the key rattled loudly into place  
Seemed to warn someone to be getting out 20  
At one door as we entered at another.

What if I'm right, and someone all the time—  
Don't hold my arm!"

"I say it's someone passing."

"You speak as if this were a traveled road.  
You forget where we are. What is beyond 25  
That he'd be going to or coming from  
At such an hour of night, and on foot too?  
What was he standing still for in the bushes?"

"It's not so very late—it's only dark.  
There's more in it than you're inclined to say. 30  
Did he look like——?"

"He looked like anyone.  
I'll never rest tonight unless I know.  
Give me the lantern."

"You don't want the lantern."

She pushed past him and got it for herself.

"You're not to come," she said. "This is my business. 35  
If the time's come to face it, I'm the one  
To put it the right way. He'd never dare—  
Listen! He kicked a stone. Hear that, hear that!  
He's coming towards us. Joel, go in—please.  
Hark!—I don't hear him now. But please go in." 40

"In the first place you can't make me believe it's——"

"It is—or someone else he's sent to watch.  
And now's the time to have it out with him  
While we know definitely where he is.  
Let him get off and he'll be everywhere 45  
Around us, looking out of trees and bushes  
Till I shan't dare to set a foot outdoors.

And I can't stand it. Joel, let me go!"

"But it's nonsense to think he'd care enough."

"You mean you couldn't understand his caring. 50  
Oh, but you see he hadn't had enough—  
Joel, I won't—I won't—I promise you.  
We mustn't say hard things. You mustn't either."

"I'll be the one, if anybody goes!  
But you give him the advantage with this light. 55  
What couldn't he do to us standing here!  
And if to see was what he wanted, why,  
He has seen all there was to see and gone."

He appeared to forget to keep his hold,  
But advanced with her as she crossed the grass. 60

"What do you want?" she cried to all the dark.  
She stretched up tall to overlook the light  
That hung in both hands, hot against her skirt.

"There's no one; so you're wrong," he said.

"There is.—

What do you want?" she cried, and then herself 65  
Was startled when an answer really came.

"Nothing." It came from well along the road.

She reached a hand to Joel for support:  
The smell of scorching woolen made her faint.  
"What are you doing round this house at night?" 70

"Nothing." A pause: there seemed no more to say.

And then the voice again: "You seem afraid.  
I saw by the way you whipped up the horse.  
I'll just come forward in the lantern-light

And let you see."

"Yes, do.—Joel, go back!"

75

She stood her ground against the noisy steps  
That came on, but her body rocked a little.

"You see," the voice said.

"Oh." She looked and looked.

"You don't see—I've a child here by the hand.  
A robber wouldn't have his family with him."

80

"What's a child doing at this time of night——?"

"Out walking. Every child should have the memory  
Of at least one long-after-bedtime walk.  
What, son?"

"Then I should think you'd try to find  
Somewhere to walk——"

84

"The highway, as it happens—  
We're stopping for the fortnight down at Dean's."

"But if that's all—Joel—you realize—  
You won't think anything. You understand?  
You understand that we have to be careful.

This is a very, very lonely place.—  
Joel!" She spoke as if she couldn't turn.  
The swinging lantern lengthened to the ground,  
It touched, it struck, it clattered and went out.

90

### THE SELF-SEEKER

"Willis, I didn't want you here today:  
The lawyer's coming for the company.  
I'm going to sell my soul, or rather, feet.

Five hundred dollars for the pair, you know."

"With you the feet have nearly been the soul;  
And if you're going to sell them to the devil,  
I want to see you do it. When's he coming?"

5

"I half suspect you knew, and came on purpose  
To try to help me drive a better bargain."

"Well, if it's true! Yours are no common feet.  
The lawyer don't know what it is he's buying:  
So many miles you might have walked you won't walk.  
You haven't run your forty orchids down.  
What does he think?—How *are* the blessed feet?  
The doctor's sure you're going to walk again?"

10

15

"He thinks I'll hobble. It's both legs and feet."

"They must be terrible—I mean, to look at."

"I haven't dared to look at them uncovered.  
Through the bed blankets I remind myself  
Of a starfish laid out with rigid points."

20

"The wonder is it hadn't been your head."

"It's hard to tell you how I managed it.  
When I saw the shaft had me by the coat,  
I didn't try too long to pull away,  
Or fumble for my knife to cut away,  
I just embraced the shaft and rode it out—  
Till Weiss shut off the water in the wheel pit.  
That's how I think I didn't lose my head.  
But my legs got their knocks against the ceiling."

25

"Awful. Why didn't they throw off the belt  
Instead of going clear down in the wheel pit?"

30

"They say some time was wasted on the belt—  
 Old streak of leather—doesn't love me much  
 Because I make him spit fire at my knuckles,  
 The way Ben Franklin used to make the kite string. 35  
 That must be it. Some days he won't stay on.  
 That day a woman couldn't coax him off.  
 He's on his rounds now with his tail in his mouth,  
 Snatched right and left across the silver pulleys.  
 Everything goes the same without me there. 40  
 You can hear the small buzz saws whine, the big saw  
 Caterwaul to the hills around the village  
 As they both bite the wood. It's all our music.  
 One ought as a good villager to like it.  
 No doubt it has a sort of prosperous sound, 45  
 And it's our life."

"Yes, when it's not our death."

"You make that sound as if it wasn't so  
 With everything. What we live by we die by.—  
 I wonder where my lawyer is. His train's in.  
 I want this over with; I'm hot and tired." 50

"You're getting ready to do something foolish."

"Watch for him, will you, Will? You let him in.  
 I'd rather Mrs. Corbin didn't know;  
 I've boarded here so long, she thinks she owns me.  
 You're bad enough to manage, without her." 55

"I'm going to be worse instead of better.  
 You've got to tell me how far this is gone:  
 Have you agreed to any price?"

"Five hundred.

Five hundred—five—five! One, two, three, four, five.

You needn't look at me."

"I don't believe you." 60

"I told you, Willis, when you first came in.  
 Don't you be hard on me. I have to take  
 What I can get. You see they have the feet,  
 Which gives them the advantage in the trade.  
 I can't get back the feet in any case." 65

"But your flowers, man, you're selling out your flowers."

"Yes, that's one way to put it—all the flowers  
 Of every kind everywhere in this region  
 For the next forty summers—call it forty.  
 But I'm not selling those, I'm giving them; 70  
 They never earned me so much as one cent:  
 Money can't pay me for the loss of them.  
 No, the five hundred was the sum they named  
 To pay the doctor's bill and tide me over.  
 It's that or fight, and I don't want to fight— 75  
 I just want to get settled in my life,  
 Such as it's going to be, and know the worst,  
 Or best—it may not be so bad. The firm  
 Promise me all the shooks I want to nail."

"But what about your flora of the valley?" 80

"You have me there. But that—you didn't think  
 That was worth money to me? Still I own  
 It goes against me not to finish it  
 For the friends it might bring me. By the way,  
 I had a letter from Burroughs—did I tell you?— 85  
 About my *Cypripedium reginæ*;  
 He says it's not reported so far north.—  
 There! there's the bell. He's rung. But you go down

And bring him up, and don't let Mrs. Corbin.—  
Oh, well, we'll soon be through with it. I'm tired." 90

Willis brought up besides the Boston lawyer  
A little barefoot girl, who in the noise  
Of heavy footsteps in the old frame house,  
And baritone importance of the lawyer,  
Stood for a while unnoticed, with her hands 95  
Shyly behind her.

"Well, and how is Mister . . . ?"  
The lawyer was already in his satchel  
As if for papers that might bear the name  
He hadn't at command. "You must excuse me,  
I dropped in at the mill and was detained." 100

"Looking round, I suppose," said Willis.

Well, yes." "Yes,

"Hear anything that might prove useful?"  
The Broken One saw Anne. "Why, here is Anne.  
What do you want, dear? Come, stand by the bed;  
Tell me what is it?"

Anne just wagged her dress, 105  
With both hands held behind her. "Guess," she said.

"Oh, guess which hand? My, my! Once on a time  
I knew a lovely way to tell for certain  
By looking in the ears. But I forget it.  
Er, let me see. I think I'll take the right. 110  
That's sure to be right, even if it's wrong.  
Come, hold it out. Don't change.—A Ram's Horn orchid!  
A Ram's Horn! What would I have got, I wonder,

If I had chosen left. Hold out the left.  
Another Ram's Horn! Where did you find those, 115  
Under what beech tree, on what woodchuck's knoll?"

Anne looked at the large lawyer at her side,  
And thought she wouldn't venture on so much.

"Were there no others?"

"There were four or five.  
I knew you wouldn't let me pick them all." 120

"I wouldn't—so I wouldn't. You're the girl!  
You see Anne has her lesson learned by heart."

"I wanted there should be some there next year."

"Of course you did. You left the rest for seed,  
And for the backwoods woodchuck. You're the girl! 125  
A Ram's Horn orchid seedpod for a woodchuck  
Sounds something like. Better than farmer's beans  
To a discriminating appetite,

Though the Ram's Horn is seldom to be had  
In bushel lots—doesn't come on the market. 130  
But, Anne, I'm troubled; have you told me all?  
You're hiding something. That's as bad as lying.

You ask this lawyer man. And it's not safe  
With a lawyer at hand to find you out.  
Nothing is hidden from some people, Anne. 135  
You don't tell me that where you found a Ram's Horn  
You didn't find a Yellow Lady's Slipper.  
What did I tell you? What? I'd blush, I would.  
Don't you defend yourself. If it was there,  
Where is it now, the Yellow Lady's Slipper?" 140

"Well, wait—it's common—it's too *common*."

"Common?"

The Purple Lady's Slipper's commoner."

"I didn't bring a Purple Lady's Slipper.  
To *You*—to you I mean—they're both too common."

The lawyer gave a laugh among his papers 145  
As if with some idea that she had scored.

"I've broken Anne of gathering bouquets.  
It's not fair to the child. It can't be helped, though:  
Pressed into service means pressed out of shape.  
Somehow I'll make it right with her—she'll see. 150  
She's going to do my scouting in the field,  
Over stone walls and all along a wood  
And by a river bank for water flowers,  
The Floating Heart, with small leaf like a heart,  
And at the sinus under water a fist 155  
Of little fingers all kept down but one,  
And that thrust up to blossom in the sun  
As if to say, 'You! You're the Heart's desire.'  
Anne has a way with flowers to take the place  
Of what she's lost: she goes down on one knee 160  
And lifts their faces by the chin to hers  
And says their names, and leaves them where they are."

The lawyer wore a watch the case of which  
Was cunningly devised to make a noise  
Like a small pistol when he snapped it shut 165  
At such a time as this. He snapped it now.

"Well, Anne, go, dearie. Our affair will wait.  
The lawyer man is thinking of his train.  
He wants to give me lots and lots of money  
Before he goes, because I hurt myself, 170  
And it may take him I don't know how long.

But put our flowers in water first.—Will, help her:  
The pitcher's too full for her.—There's no cup?  
Just hook them on the inside of the pitcher.  
Now run.—Get out your documents! You see 175  
I have to keep on the good side of Anne.  
I'm a great boy to think of number one.  
And you can't blame me in the place I'm in.  
Who will take care of my necessities  
Unless I do?"

"A pretty interlude," 180  
The lawyer said. "I'm sorry, but my train—  
Luckily terms are all agreed upon.  
You only have to sign your name. Right—there."

"You, Will, stop making faces. Come round here  
Where you can't make them. What is it you want? 185  
I'll put you out with Anne. Be good or go."

"You don't mean you will sign that thing unread?"

"Make yourself useful, then, and read it for me.—  
Isn't it something I have seen before?"

"You'll find it is. Let your friend look at it." 190

"Yes, but all that takes time, and I'm as much  
In haste to get it over with as you.—  
But read it, read it.—That's right, draw the curtain:  
Half the time I don't know what's troubling me.—  
What do you say, Will? Don't you be a fool, 195  
You, crumpling folks's legal documents.  
Out with it if you've any real objection."

"Five hundred dollars!"

"What would you think right?"

"A thousand wouldn't be a cent too much;  
You know it, Mr. Lawyer. The sin is  
Accepting anything before he knows  
Whether he's ever going to walk again.  
It smells to me like a dishonest trick."

"I think—I think—from what I heard today—  
And saw myself—he would be ill-advised——"

"What did you hear, for instance?" Willis said.

"Now, the place where the accident occurred——"

The Broken One was twisted in his bed.  
"This is between you two apparently.  
Where I come in is what I want to know.  
You stand up to it like a pair of cocks.  
Go outdoors if you want to fight. Spare me.  
When you come back, I'll have the papers signed.  
Will pencil do? Then, please, your fountain pen.  
One of you hold my head up from the pillow."

Willis flung off the bed. "I wash my hands—  
I'm no match—no, and don't pretend to be——"

The lawyer gravely capped his fountain pen.  
"You're doing the wise thing: you won't regret it.  
We're very sorry for you."

Willis sneered:  
"Who's *we*?—some stockholders in Boston?  
I'll go outdoors, by gad, and won't come back."

"Willis, bring Anne back with you when you come.  
Yes. Thanks for caring.—Don't mind Will: he's savage.  
He thinks you ought to pay me for my flowers.  
You don't know what I mean about the flowers."

Don't stop to try to now. You'll miss your train.  
Good-by." He flung his arms around his face.

## THE WOOD-PILE

Out walking in the frozen swamp one gray day,  
I paused and said, "I will turn back from here.  
No, I will go on farther—and we shall see."  
The hard snow held me, save where now and then  
One foot went through. The view was all in lines  
Straight up and down of tall slim trees  
Too much alike to mark or name a place by  
So as to say for certain I was here  
Or somewhere else: I was just far from home.  
A small bird flew before me. He was careful  
To put a tree between us when he lighted,  
And say no word to tell me who he was  
Who was so foolish as to think what *he* thought.  
He thought that I was after him for a feather—  
The white one in his tail; like one who takes  
Everything said as personal to himself.  
One flight out sideways would have undeceived him.  
And then there was a pile of wood for which  
I forgot him and let his little fear  
Carry him off the way I might have gone,  
Without so much as wishing him good-night.  
He went behind it to make his last stand.  
It was a cord of maple, cut and split  
And piled—and measured, four by four by eight.  
And not another like it could I see.  
No runner tracks in this year's snow looped near it.  
And it was older sure than this year's cutting,  
Or even last year's or the year's before.



The wood was gray and the bark warping off it  
And the pile somewhat sunken. Clematis  
Had wound strings round and round it like a bundle.  
What held it, though, on one side was a tree  
Still growing, and on one a stake and prop,  
These latter about to fall. I thought that only  
Someone who lived in turning to fresh tasks  
Could so forget his handiwork on which  
He spent himself, the labor of his ax,  
And leave it there far from a useful fireplace  
To warm the frozen swamp as best it could  
With the slow smokeless burning of decay.

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### GOOD HOURS

I had for my winter evening walk—  
No one at all with whom to talk,  
But I had the cottages in a row  
Up to their shining eyes in snow.

And I thought I had the folk within:  
I had the sound of a violin;  
I had a glimpse through curtain laces  
Of youthful forms and youthful faces.

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I had such company outward bound.  
I went till there were no cottages found.  
I turned and repented, but coming back  
I saw no window but that was black.

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Over the snow my creaking feet  
Disturbed the slumbering village street  
Like profanation, by your leave,  
At ten o'clock of a winter eve.

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