

# **From Mountain Interval**

Robert Frost

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# From Mountain Interval

Robert Frost

## THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

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;  
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,  
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.  
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,  
And that has made all the difference.

## AN OLD MAN'S WINTER NIGHT

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.  
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  
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  
Where now he sat, concerned with he knew what,  
A quiet light, and then not even that.

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He consigned to the moon, such as she was,  
So late-arising, to the broken moon  
As better than the sun in any case  
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.  
One aged man -- one man -- can't keep a house,  
A farm, a countryside, or if he can,  
It's thus he does it of a winter night.

## The Exposed Nest

You were forever finding some new play.  
So when I saw you down on hands and knees  
I the meadow, busy with the new-cut hay,  
Trying, I thought, to set it up on end,  
I went to show you how to make it stay,  
If that was your idea, against the breeze,  
And, if you asked me, even help pretend  
To make it root again and grow afresh.  
But 'twas no make-believe with you today,  
Nor was the grass itself your real concern,  
Though I found your hand full of wilted fern,  
Steel-bright June-grass, and blackening heads of clovers.  
'Twas a nest full of young birds on the ground  
The cutter-bar had just gone champing over  
(Miraculously without tasking flesh)  
And left defenseless to the heat and light.  
You wanted to restore them to their right  
Of something interposed between their sight  
And too much world at once--could means be found.  
The way the nest--full every time we stirred  
Stood up to us as to a mother-bird  
Whose coming home has been too long deferred,  
Made me ask would the mother-bird return  
And care for them in such a change of scene  
And might out meddling make her more afraid.  
That was a thing we could not wait to learn.  
We saw the risk we took in doing good,  
But dared not spare to do the best we could  
Though harm should come of it; so built the screen  
You had begun, and gave them back their shade.  
All this to prove we cared. Why is there then  
No more to tell? We turned to other things.  
I haven't any memory--have you?--  
Of ever coming to the place again  
To see if the birds lived the first night through,

And so at last to learn to use their wings.

## A Patch of Old Snow

There's a patch of old snow in a corner  
That I should have guessed  
Was a blow-away paper the rain  
Had brought to rest.

It is speckled with grime as if  
Small print overspread it,  
The news of a day I've forgotten—  
If I ever read it.

## The Telephone

'When I was just as far as I could walk  
From here today,  
There was an hour  
All still  
When leaning with my head again a flower  
I heard you talk.  
Don't say I didn't, for I heard you say—  
You spoke from that flower on the window sill—  
Do you remember what it was you said?'

'First tell me what it was you thought you heard.'

'Having found the flower and driven a bee away,  
I leaned on my head  
And holding by the stalk,  
I listened and I thought I caught the word—  
What was it? Did you call me by my name?  
Or did you say—  
Someone said "Come" — I heard it as I bowed.'

'I may have thought as much, but not aloud.'

"Well, so I came.'

## Meeting and Passing

As I went down the hill along the wall  
There was a gate I had leaned at for the view  
And had just turned from when I first saw you  
As you came up the hill. We met. But all  
We did that day was mingle great and small  
Footprints in summer dust as if we drew  
The figure of our being less than two  
But more than one as yet. Your parasol  
Pointed the decimal off with one deep thrust.  
And all the time we talked you seemed to see  
Something down there to smile at in the dust.  
(Oh, it was without prejudice to me!)  
Afterward I went past what you had passed  
Before we met and you what I had passed.

## Hyla Brook

By June our brook's run out of song and speed.  
Sought for much after that, it will be found  
Either to have gone groping underground  
(And taken with it all the Hyla breed  
That shouted in the mist a month ago,  
Like ghost of sleigh-bells in a ghost of snow)—  
Or flourished and come up in jewel-weed,  
Weak foliage that is blown upon and bent  
Even against the way its waters went.  
Its bed is left a faded paper sheet  
Of dead leaves stuck together by the heat—  
A brook to none but who remember long.  
This as it will be seen is other far  
Than with brooks taken elsewhere in song.  
We love the things we love for what they are.

## The Oven Bird

There is a singer everyone has heard,  
Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,  
Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.  
He says that leaves are old and that for flowers  
Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.  
he says the early petal-fall is past

## From Mountain Interval

When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers  
On sunny days a moment overcast;  
And comes that other fall we name the fall.  
He says the highway dust is over all.  
The bird would cease and be as other birds  
But that he knows in singing not to sing.  
The question that he frames in all but words  
Is what to make of a diminished thing.

## Bond and Free

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.

On snow and sand and turn, 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.

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.

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.

## BIRCHES

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  
Loaded with ice a sunny winter morning  
After a rain. They click upon themselves  
As the breeze rises, and turn many-coloured

## From Mountain Interval

As the stir cracks and crazes their enamel.  
Soon the sun's warmth makes them shed crystal shells  
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  
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.  
But I was going to say when Truth broke in  
With all her matter—of—fact about the ice—storm,  
I should prefer to have some boy bend them  
As he went out and in to fetch the cows—  
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  
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  
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,  
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  
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.  
May no fate wilfully 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~  
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.



## **PUTTING IN THE SEED**

You come to fetch me from my work to-night  
When supper's on the table, and we'll see  
If I can leave off burying the white  
Soft petals fallen from the apple tree  
(Soft petals, yes, but not so barren quite,  
Mingled with these, smooth bean and wrinkled pea);  
And go along with you ere you lose sight  
Of what you came for and become like me,  
Slave to a Springtime passion for the earth.  
How Love burns through the Putting in the Seed  
On through the watching for that early birth  
When, just as the soil tarnishes with weed,  
The sturdy seedling with arched body comes  
Shouldering its way and shedding the earth crumbs.

## **A Time to Talk**

When a friend calls to me from the road  
And slows his horse to a meaning walk,  
I don't stand still and look around  
On all the hills I haven't hoed,  
And shout from where I am, 'What is it?'  
No, not as there is a time talk.  
I thrust my hoe in the mellow ground,  
Blade-end up and five feet tall,  
And plod: I go up to the stone wall  
For a friendly visit.

## **THE COW IN APPLE-TIME**

Something inspires the only cow of late  
To make no more of a wall than an open gate,  
And think no more of wall-builders than fools.  
Her face is flecked with pomace and she drools  
A cider syrup. Having tasted fruit,  
She scorns a pasture withering to the root.  
She runs from tree to tree where lie and sweeten.  
The windfalls spiked with stubble and worm-eaten.  
She leaves them bitten when she has to fly.  
She bellows on a knoll against the sky.  
Her udder shrivels and the milk goes dry.

## Range-Finding

The battle rent a cobweb diamond—strung  
And cut a flower beside a ground bird's nest  
Before it stained a single human breast.  
The stricken flower bent double and so hung.  
And still the bird revisited her young.  
A butterfly its fall had dispossessed  
A moment sought in air his flower of rest,  
Then lightly stooped to it and fluttering clung.  
On the bare upland pasture there had spread  
O'ernight 'twixt mullein stalks a wheel of thread  
And straining cables wet with silver dew.  
A sudden passing bullet shook it dry.  
The indwelling spider ran to greet the fly,  
But finding nothing, sullenly withdrew.

## THE HILL WIFE

### LONELINESS

(Her Word)

One ought not to have to care  
So much as you and I  
Care when the birds come round the house  
To seem to say good-bye;  
Or care so much when they come back  
With whatever it is they sing;  
The truth being we are as much  
Too glad for the one thing  
As we are too sad for the other here —  
With birds that fill their breasts  
But with each other and themselves  
And their built or driven nests.

### HOUSE FEAR

Always — I tell you this they learned—  
Always at night when they returned  
To the lonely house from far away  
To lamps unlighted and fire gone gray,  
They learned to rattle the lock and key  
To give whatever might chance to be  
Warning and time to be off in flight:  
And preferring the out- to the in-door night,  
They learned to leave the house-door wide  
Until they had lit the lamp inside.

### THE SMILE

(Her Word)

## From Mountain Interval

I didn't like the way he went away.  
That smile! It never came of being gay.  
Still he smiled— did you see him?— I was sure!  
Perhaps because we gave him only bread  
And the wretch knew from that that we were poor.  
Perhaps because he let us give instead  
Of seizing from us as he might have seized.  
Perhaps he mocked at us for being wed,  
Or being very young (and he was pleased  
To have a vision of us old and dead).  
I wonder how far down the road he's got.  
He's watching from the woods as like as not.

### THE OFT—REPEATED DREAM

She had no saying dark enough  
For the dark pine that kept  
Forever trying the window—latch  
Of the room where they slept.  
The tireless but ineffectual hands  
That with every futile pass  
Made the great tree seem as a little bird  
Before the mystery of glass!  
It never had been inside the room,  
And only one of the two  
Was afraid in an oft—repeated dream  
Of what the tree might do.

### THE IMPULSE

It was too lonely for her there,  
And too wild,  
And since there were but two of them,  
And no child,  
And work was little in the house,  
She was free,  
And followed where he furrowed field,  
Or felled tree.  
She rested on a log and tossed  
The fresh chips,  
With a song only to herself  
On her lips.  
And once she went to break a bough  
Of black alder.  
She strayed so far she scarcely heard.  
When he called her—  
And didn't answer — didn't speak —  
Or return.  
She stood, and then she ran and hid  
In the fern.  
He never found her, though he looked  
Everywhere,  
And he asked at her mother's house  
Was she there.  
Sudden and swift and light as that

The ties gave,  
And he learned of finalities  
Besides the grave.

### 'OUT, OUT--'

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  
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  
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,  
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  
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  
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.  
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.

### THE GUM-GATHERER

There overtook me and drew me in  
To his down-hill, early-morning stride,  
And set me five miles on my road  
Better than if he had had me ride,  
A man with a swinging bag for'load  
And half the bag wound round his hand.

'OUT, OUT--'

## From Mountain Interval

We talked like barking above the din  
Of water we walked along beside.  
And for my telling him where I'd been  
And where I lived in mountain land  
To be coming home the way I was,  
He told me a little about himself.  
He came from higher up in the pass  
Where the grist of the new-beginning brooks  
Is blocks split off the mountain mass --  
And hop. eless grist enough it looks  
Ever to grind to soil for grass.  
(The way it is will do for moss.)  
There he had built his stolen shack.  
It had to be a stolen shack  
Because of the fears of fire and logs  
That trouble the sleep of lumber folk:  
Visions of half the world burned black  
And the sun shrunken yellow in smoke.  
We know who when they come to town  
Bring berries under the wagon seat,  
Or a basket of eggs between their feet;  
What this man brought in a cotton sack  
Was gum, the gum of the mountain spruce.  
He showed me lumps of the scented stuff  
Like uncut jewels, dull and rough  
It comes to market golden brown;  
But turns to pink between the teeth.  
I told him this is a pleasant life  
To set your breast to the bark of trees  
That all your days are dim beneath,  
And reaching up with a little knife,  
To loose the resin and take it down  
And bring it to market when you please.

### The Line-Gang

Here come the line-gang pioneering by,  
They throw a forest down less cut than broken.  
They plant dead trees for living, and the dead  
They string together with a living thread.  
They string an instrument against the sky  
Wherein words whether beaten out or spoken  
Will run as hushed as when they were a thought  
But in no hush they string it: they go past  
With shouts afar to pull the cable taught,  
To hold it hard until they make it fast,  
To ease away—they have it. With a laugh,  
An oath of towns that set the wild at naught  
They bring the telephone and telegraph.

## The Vanishing Red

He is said to have been the last Red man  
In Action. And the Miller is said to have laughed—  
If you like to call such a sound a laugh.  
But he gave no one else a laugher's license.  
For he turned suddenly grave as if to say,  
'Whose business,—if I take it on myself,  
Whose business—but why talk round the barn?—  
When it's just that I hold with getting a thing done with.'  
You can't get back and see it as he saw it.  
It's too long a story to go into now.  
You'd have to have been there and lived it.  
They you wouldn't have looked on it as just a matter  
Of who began it between the two races.

Some guttural exclamation of surprise  
The Red man gave in poking about the mill  
Over the great big thumping shuffling millstone  
Disgusted the Miller physically as coming  
From one who had no right to be heard from.  
'Come, John,' he said, 'you want to see the wheel—pint?'

He took him down below a cramping rafter,  
And showed him, through a manhole in the floor,  
The water in desperate straits like frantic fish,  
Salmon and sturgeon, lashing with their tails.  
The he shut down the trap door with a ring in it  
That jangled even above the general noise,  
And came upstairs alone—and gave that laugh,  
And said something to a man with a meal—sack  
That the man with the meal—sack didn't catch—then.  
Oh, yes, he showed John the wheel—pit all right.