

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
 As ice-storms do. 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
 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, 25
 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, 30
 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 35
 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. 40
 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 45
 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 willfully misunderstand me 50
 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 55
 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.

Listen to Frost read "Birches"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aBw-OaOWddY>

A Prayer in Spring

Oh, give us pleasure in the flowers today;
And give us not to think so far away
As the uncertain harvest; keep us here
All simply in the springing of the year.

Oh, give us pleasure in the orchard white, 5
Like nothing else by day, like ghosts by night;
And make us happy in the happy bees,
The swarm dilating round the perfect trees.

And make us happy in the darting bird
That suddenly above the bees is heard, 10
The meteor that thrusts in with needle bill,
And off a blossom in mid-air stands still.

For this is love and nothing else is love,
The which it is reserved for God above
To sanctify to what far ends He will, 15
But which it only needs that we fulfil.

The Tuft of Flowers

I went to turn the grass once after one
Who mowed it in the dew before the sun.

The dew was gone that made his blade so keen
Before I came to view the levelled scene.

I looked for him behind an isle of trees; 5
I listened for his whetstone on the breeze.

But he had gone his way, the grass all mown,
And I must be, as he had been—alone,

“As all must be,” I said within my heart,
“Whether they work together or apart.” 10

But as I said it, swift there passed me by
On noiseless wing a bewildered butterfly,

Seeking with memories grown dim o'er night
Some resting flower of yesterday's delight.

And once I marked his flight go round and round, 15
As where some flower lay withering on the ground.

And then he flew as far as eye could see,
And then on tremulous wing came back to me.

I thought of questions that have no reply,
And would have turned to toss the grass to dry; 20

But he turned first, and led my eye to look
 At a tall tuft of flowers beside a brook,

A leaping tongue of bloom the scythe had spared
 Beside a reedy brook the scythe had bared.

I left my place to know them by their name, 25
 Finding them butterfly weed when I came.

The mower in the dew had loved them thus,
 By leaving them to flourish, not for us,

Nor yet to draw one thought of ours to him. 30
 But from sheer morning gladness at the brim.

The butterfly and I had lit upon,
 Nevertheless, a message from the dawn,

That made me hear the wakening birds around,
 And hear his long scythe whispering to the ground,

And feel a spirit kindred to my own; 35
 So that henceforth I worked no more alone;

But glad with him, I worked as with his aid,
 And weary, sought at noon with him the shade;

And dreaming, as it were, held brotherly speech 40
 With one whose thought I had not hoped to reach.

“Men work together,” I told him from the heart,
 “Whether they work together or apart.”

Two Tramps in Mud Time

Out of the mud two strangers came
 And caught me splitting wood in the yard,
 And one of them put me off my aim
 By hailing cheerily “Hit them hard!”

I knew pretty well why he dropped behind 5
 And let the other go on a way.
 I knew pretty well what he had in mind:
 He wanted to take my job for pay.

Good blocks of beech it was I split,
 As large around as the chopping block; 10
 And every piece I squarely hit
 Fell splinterless as a cloven rock.
 The blows that a life of self-control
 Spares to strike for the common good
 That day, giving a loose to my soul, 15
 I spent on the unimportant wood.

The sun was warm but the wind was chill.
 You know how it is with an April day
 When the sun is out and the wind is still,
 You’re one month on in the middle of May. 20
 But if you so much as dare to speak,
 A cloud comes over the sunlit arch,
 A wind comes off a frozen peak,
 And you’re two months back in the middle of March.

A bluebird comes tenderly up to alight 25
 And turns to the wind to unruffle a plume
 His song so pitched as not to excite
 A single flower as yet to bloom.

It is snowing a flake: and he half knew
Winter was only playing possum.
Except in color he isn't blue,
But he wouldn't advise a thing to blossom.

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The water for which we may have to look
In summertime with a witching wand,
In every wheel rut's now a brook,
In every print of a hoof a pond.
Be glad of water, but don't forget
The lurking frost in the earth beneath
That will steal forth after the sun is set
And show on the water its crystal teeth.

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The time when most I loved my task
These two must make me love it more
By coming with what they came to ask.
You'd think I never had felt before
The weight of an ax-head poised aloft,
The grip on earth of outspread feet.
The life of muscles rocking soft
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

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Out of the woods two hulking tramps
(From sleeping God knows where last night,
But not long since in the lumber camps.)
They thought all chopping was theirs of right.
Men of the woods and lumberjacks,
They judged me by their appropriate tool.
Except as a fellow handled an ax,
They had no way of knowing a fool.

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Nothing on either side was said.
They knew they had but to stay their stay
And all their logic would fill my head:
As that I had no right to play
With what was another man's work for gain.
My right might be love but theirs was need.
And where the two exist in twain
Theirs was the better right — agreed.

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But yield who will to their separation,
My object in living is to unite
My avocation and my vocation
As my two eyes make one in sight.
Only where love and need are one,
And the work is play for mortal stakes,
Is the deed ever really done
For heaven and the future's sakes.

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