



POETRY FOR KIDS

Robert Frost

EDITED BY JAY PARINI, PhD

ILLUSTRATED BY
MICHAEL PARASKEVAS

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First Published in 2017 by MoonDance Press, an imprint of The Quarto Group.

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ISBN: 978-1-63322-220-5

Digital edition: 978-1-63322-566-4

Hardcover edition: 978-1-63322-220-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Frost, Robert, 1874-1963, author. | Parini, Jay, editor. | Paraskevas, Michael, 1961- illustrator.

Title: Poetry for Kids : Robert Frost / edited by Jay Parini ; illustrated by Michael Paraskevas.

Description: Lake Forest, CA : MoonDance Press, [2017] | Series: Poetry for Kids

Identifiers: LCCN 2017010647 | ISBN 9781633222205 (hardback)

Subjects: | BISAC: JUVENILE NONFICTION / Poetry / General. | JUVENILE NONFICTION / Biography & Autobiography / Literary. | JUVENILE NONFICTION / People & Places / United States / General.

Classification: LCC PS3511.R94 A6 2017 | DDC 811/.52--dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017010647>

Cover design and layout by Melissa Gerber

Printed in China

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



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Introduction

Robert Frost (1874–1963) once said that a poem should “begin in delight and end in wisdom.” Frost’s poems are both delightful—full of humor and high spirits—and wise. They often deliver a nugget of truth that stays with you long after you put the poem down.

Frost’s poems are usually set in northern New England, especially in New Hampshire and Vermont, where he lived on farms throughout his long life. Unsurprisingly, his best poems deal with the everyday work of farm labor. They focus on such tasks as sowing seeds in the ground in springtime, mowing a hayfield at the end of summer, and picking apples in the fall.

Frost believed strongly in metaphor—that is, saying one thing in terms of another. For example, in the poem “Mowing,” he uses the language of harvesting crops (describing mowing wheat and setting it in the sun to ripen) to talk about feelings and writing poetry. When the poet harvests the emotions of a time period, he cuts them down, bundles them into lines or stanzas, and allows the hay “to make.” Almost any of the poems in this collection can be read as a metaphor. Frost writes simply about a task or a situation and invites you to think in wider terms about the image or idea that centers the poem.

Frost was born in San Francisco, California, and lived there with his parents and his sister until he was eleven years old, when his father died. He then moved with his family to Massachusetts, where he attended high school. After an early marriage and two attempts at college, he settled on a farm in Derry, New Hampshire. There he and his wife, Elinor, raised chickens and four young children.

Frost loved going to the general store in town, where he listened to farmers tell stories. He quickly saw that there was poetry in their lively way of talking. He learned to listen for the beauty in ordinary speech, what he called “the sound of sense,” which is the music of language in conversation. Frost’s poems became conversational, using simple words but combining them in ways that made them extremely memorable. For example, in “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” he writes about the wind blowing over the snow through the night woods: “The only other sound’s the sweep / Of easy wind and downy flake.”

Few other poets have captured the lives of ordinary people, their dreams and fears, their joy and grief, as succinctly as Robert Frost. His poetry remains a vivid testament to the wonders of nature, the pleasures and pains of farming, and the importance of poetic language as a way of framing experience and underscoring the work of thought and feeling in the creation of life itself.





The Pasture

I'm going out to clean the pasture spring;
I'll only stop to rake the leaves away
(And wait to watch the water clear, I may):
I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too.

I'm going out to fetch the little calf
That's standing by the mother. It's so young,
It totters when she licks it with her tongue.
I sha'n't be gone long.—You come too.

Totters — wobbles, wavers

A Late Walk

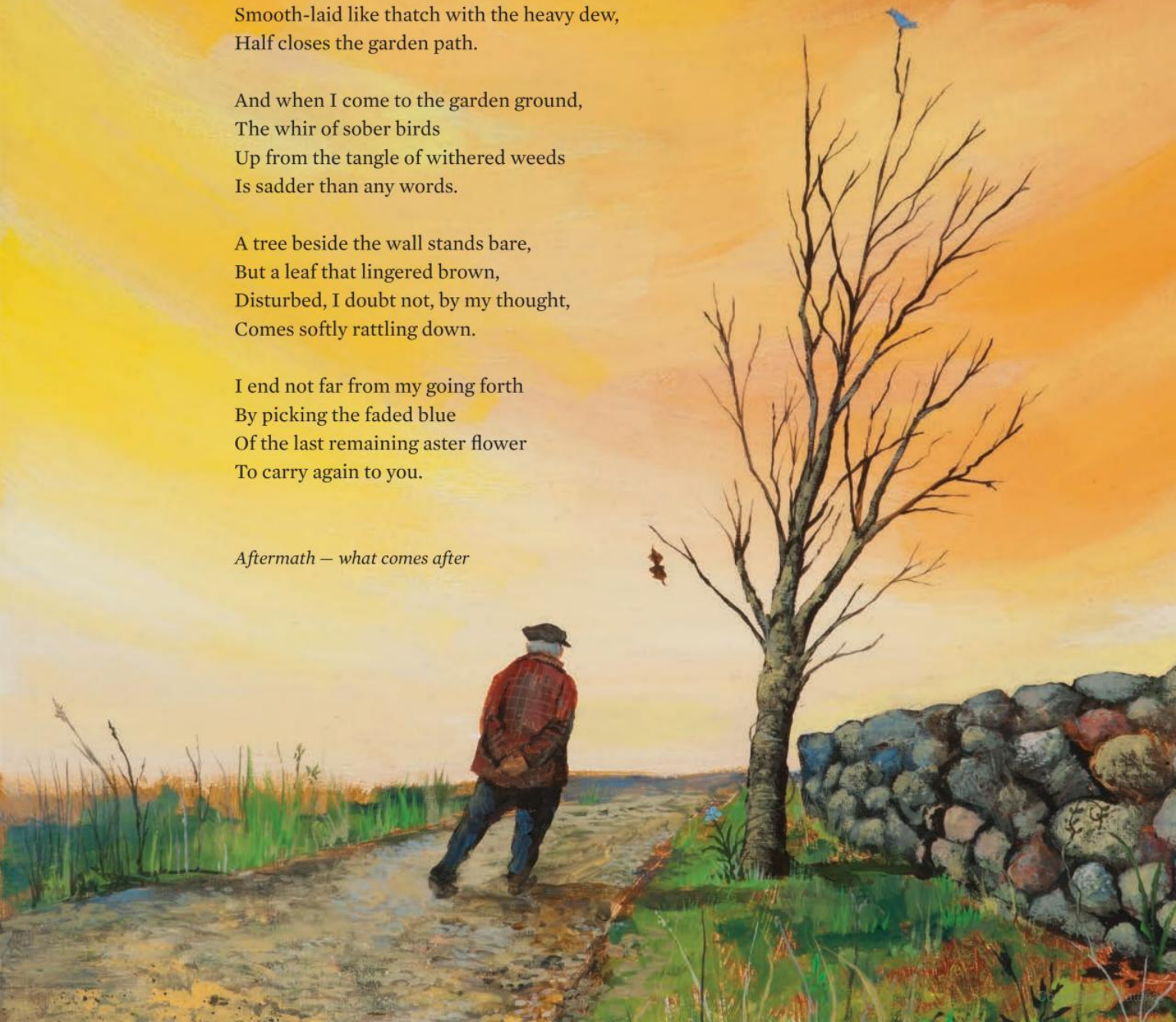
When I go up through the mowing field,
The headless aftermath,
Smooth-laid like thatch with the heavy dew,
Half closes the garden path.

And when I come to the garden ground,
The whirl of sober birds
Up from the tangle of withered weeds
Is sadder than any words.

A tree beside the wall stands bare,
But a leaf that lingered brown,
Disturbed, I doubt not, by my thought,
Comes softly rattling down.

I end not far from my going forth
By picking the faded blue
Of the last remaining aster flower
To carry again to you.

Aftermath — what comes after







Into My Own

One of my wishes is that those dark trees,
So old and firm they scarcely show the breeze,
Were not, as 'twere, the merest mask of gloom,
But stretched away unto the edge of doom.

*'Twere — as it were
Steal away — sneak away
E'er — ever*

I should not be withheld but that some day
Into their vastness I should steal away,
Fearless of ever finding open land,
Or highway where the slow wheel pours the sand.

I do not see why I should e'er turn back,
Or those should not set forth upon my track
To overtake me, who should miss me here
And long to know if still I held them dear.

They would not find me changed from him they knew—
Only more sure of all I thought was true.