



In Answer to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"

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Not two paths in the damp depths of a wood,
no yellow leaf, no slowness of the mind —
at first there was a light alone, mute, alive,
not yet become a choosing and a noise.
No one yet knew or “I”, or “where” it stood,
nor rightness, nor a fear, nor an answer’s voice.
Only what is lay resting everywhere,
not parting dark from light, from light the road.

Then came the wood as well, and came the man,
and the mind shuddered at a phantom line.
And what had been one whole since the beginning
was suddenly called duality in faces.
The mind said: this one runs into the deep,
and that one bends aside, to some strange fate.
But choice was only a shape the mind put on,
the mind that shatters wholeness into chance.

I waited long — so says the one who lived.
I peered ahead — so memory says, later.
I chose — so says the one who came to love
to call his own road the one only road.
But listen deeper into that lone hour,
where the step was not yet named as destiny —
not I who sought a road among the roads,
but the road that sought, in me, to become itself.

It seemed to me: one path alone was mine,
the other but the shade of a step undone.
Yet the hidden track did not dissolve away,
did not turn to dust, a burnt-out ravine.
It stayed and lived on quietly in me —
not as reproach, not as another lot,
but as an unseen Glimmer in the depths,
the form of a field left unexpended whole.

It is not choice that parts us; afterward
we learn the difference, little by little, slow.
While the wood goes untouched by a single day,
the two roads have not yet diverged in us.
They scarcely argue, one against the other,
beneath the dark vault of the green and shade.
Only one step calls the one a destiny,
and grants the other silence and decay.

But no, the tragedy does not live in that —
that we have let the second pathway go.
It lives in this: the mind, building its keep,
calls itself the master of its grief.
It thinks like this: “I ought to have been able
to keep both this and that, the other too.”
But life cannot go burning split in two.
It is one. And in this, perhaps, the heart of it.

Not I who chose — within me the road was chosen,
when even I myself did not yet know.
Life went on of itself, not letting me lie,
and broke through as a voice and as a light.
Not I who drew the fork into my sum,
I held no mastery of the flame or shade.
I was but that in which there woke from sleep
the depth that is older than all dividing.

And if God is not an image, not a bound
of the imagination, fear, and law,
but that which IS, by which all fate draws breath,
by which both the abyss and crown are held —
then both the wood, and the wanderer, and the path,
and choice, and doubt, and the spoken word —
are not an outer scattered murk at all,
but BEING, come to recognize itself again.

Not I — but the depth, taking on my form,
froze still there where the wood grows blacker, dim.
It wavers within me, it aches and burns,
and with time it splits the soul straight down.
And it is the depth that whispers: “this or that?”
And it is the depth that weeps for the might-have-been.
But in the hour the line falls off all things,
and the mind can rule no longer, cautiously,
it will be opened: not two fates stood there,
not two beginnings argued in the gloom —
one and the same Is, in the living crystal,
was seeking out its face in name and gloom.

Then the last line stands plain before the sight:
it is not the road that changes essence, nature.
It is not the “less-trodden” rightness here
that gives the soul its invisible water.
But that which, in each step, in every “yes”,
in each “not so”, in falling and in soaring,
one and the same, as quiet as a star,
was looking on the world through human flesh.

And so, when once again the wood for me
parts back its shade and bears out two new trails,
I do not strive to guess it all beforehand —
which pain is truer for the answer’s sake.
I choose not the beauty of the road,
not ease, not what the many have approved —
but where I can pass through more transparently
and shadow God the less with my own self.

And it may be, beyond the edge of all roads,
beyond the wood, the field, the memory, the pain,
no choice awaits, no judgment, no result,
but a silence that is filled, brimful, with the role

not of a person, not a name, not “I”,
but of pure and simple, plain abiding.
Where all that ever was — is only scales
shed from an unseen and eternal shining.

There are no longer firsts there, nor seconds,
nor those roads that have died away in the heart.
There the light is one and is not split to a stroke,
as sky is undivided at the pass.
There the sigh has hushed, and the late rumor
no longer sews its patterns out of memory.
No one ever walked there — but life itself
was always there, deeper than any form.

And if there is, past Frost, a new thing heard,
it is not that the choice is false, or hard —
but that the world, which splits itself in two,
in its deep essence is not split at all.
And the wood, the track, the memory, the longing
for that one path now hidden by the boughs —
are only ripples on what, whole through the ages,
gazes upon the world with otherworldly eyes.

the original of the poem, **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.

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