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10-22-1893

## To Harry de Forest Smith - October 22, 1893

Edwin Arlington Robinson

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TO HARRY DE FOREST SMITHGardiner, Oct<sup>a</sup> 22 - '93

My dear Smith,

It may please you to know that I am writing you this letter in the woods—to be more explicit, in "The Pines". Uncle Joe<sup>1</sup> is here with me reading a book of Stockton's stories and everything is peaceful. I wish I were in your woods with you and a volume of verse or two, but I am pretty well fixed as it is, so ought not to growl, I suppose. You must excuse my writing if it is a trifle jerky as my desk is a "geography book" on my knee. My pen doesn't go very well, but I think you will be able to make out what I say with a little labor. It will be a good change from your regular routine work.

I didn't write you last week, for which

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I trust you have pardoned me. I had considerable to contend with, and hardly found time to do anything. Will explain more fully to you sometime. The fates have stirred me up considerably during the past fifteen years, and sometimes I fall to wondering how much I am to blame for my failure thus far in life. Perhaps I am wholly to blame, but I do not like to think so. If this is cowardice, then I am a born coward and shall never be anything else. I never posed for a hero, so I do not feel as many qualms as I might otherwise.--You may not like it, but it really seems to me that you are taking things a little too hard. I would not say this, but when you speak of other men reaping in the worlds<sup>b</sup> goods in a tone that implies that you are not, I wonder if you stop to consider your age and the salary you are getting and compare it with that of the majority of men of your years. Mind you, I am

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<sup>a</sup> WA adds a period here.

<sup>b</sup> WA has "world's".

speaking wholly of worldly goods now, and

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do not include intellectual advancement. You are dissatisfied, as any man in your place would be provided he had a brain; but from the mere standpoint of money, I think you are far<sup>c</sup> ahead of most fellows whose homes are not over feathered<sup>d</sup>. Mine is bared now to an extent that worries me, in spite of what you said to me one day by the fire.

I intend to get down to work as soon as the "chores" around the house are done and then I shall try to find what is in me. My work will go into the oven before long and as I think of it I repeat to myself the lines from the potter's song in Long-fellow's "Kéramos"

"To-morrow the hot furnace-flame  
Will search the heart and try the frame,  
And stamp with honor or with shame  
These vessels made of clay."

If mine are stamped with honor, generally speaking, I shall not be altogether surprised, nor shall I be if the opposite ~~lot~~ lot comes to them. It is all in the future, and it is best that it is so. I am thankful that I cannot see<sup>e</sup> a life of

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failure before me. When I picture it to myself there is a dim vision of something else that renders it impossible for me to wholly give up the fight. I half feel that I have a Palladium somewhere that send[s] a "ruling effluence" upon my life, and though the waves of fight seem just now to be rolling against me I have not yet fallen— at least I tell myself so, and feel encouraged.

There are better things before you than you know. I say this as an observer. The tremendous change that has come over you during the past four

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<sup>c</sup> WA omits "far".

<sup>d</sup> WA places a hyphen between these two words.

<sup>e</sup> WA omits the underline.

years can only point in one direction, and that is—success in higher things. I am not say[ing] this to make you feel encouraged, but because I fully believe it. If I am wrong, I shall be glad to have known a man of whom I could think ~~of~~ such things. You and Tryon<sup>2</sup> are going to make something and I want you to meet each other. So do not let anything get between you and the pro-

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posed trip to Boston. We can make something like an epoch of it if we go to work in the right way.

I recieved a long letter from Saben yesterday in which he tells me that he has given up for good his idea of taking a course in divinity at Harvard. He thinks his past life and reputation there would render it impossible for such a course to be taken seriously by either the students or the ~~fael~~ faculty. The old man has changed his mind is [=and] is going to Oxford. I hope he will carry this idea out as he is unquestionably gifted with a fine intellect. He is not very well balanced, but that is not to be laid at his door. He is as he was made, and sometimes I think a little more so.

Joe is making frequent interruptions and his cheerful profanity doesn't at all jar upon the stillness of the day or upon the distant sound of bells that are summoning poor devils like you

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and me to divine worship. He maintains that it is a hell of a day and that he is thinking of you every hour. He sends you his love, and asks certain questions that do not seem just fitted for a letter of this kind. I will not write them, but leave you to imagin<sup>e</sup> them for yourself.

Did you know that Gledhill was married? Well, he is and is Professor of Mathematics in some

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<sup>f</sup> WA transcribes the "e".

New York institution. "Professor" sounds rather large, but as I do not know any more about the matter, I can make no comments. All I know is that Gledhill is a good fellow, and I wish him all success.--I intend to smoke a pipe now and then write two more letters before going home—one to Tryon and one to Gledhill. You may not be able to read this but at any rate, it will show you that I have written. I hope you will excuse

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my carelessness in punctuation and grammar, as it is next to impossible for me to write good English under the present circumstances. The forest is a fine place to write a thing in the rough, that is, anything that is to be copied; but when it comes to a letter, you must look for a style that is easily colloquial if not slipshod.--Good-bye, and come down next Sunday if possible.

Sincerely

E.A.R.<sup>g</sup>

HCL US, 112-114.

#### NOTES

1. Barstow.
2. James L. Tryon, a member of the Corn Cob Club at Harvard, now studying at the Episcopal Theological School in Cambridge.

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<sup>g</sup> WA omits the underline.