

TWO TRAMPS IN MUD TIME  
-Robert Frost, 1934

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 had dropped behind  
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 oak it was I split,  
As large around as the chopping block;  
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 my soul,  
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.  
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  
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.

The water for which we may have to look  
In summertime with a witching wand,  
In every wheelrut'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.

The time when most I loved my task  
The 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 of earth on outspread feet,  
The life of muscles rocking soft  
And smooth and moist in vernal heat.

Out of the wood 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,  
The judged me by their appropriate tool.  
Except as a fellow handled an ax  
They had no way of knowing a fool.

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.

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.