

Forever Golden

Robert Frost knew more about life than anybody else in this world; I'm sure of it. I find it strange, actually, to say that about a person I have never met, a poet who died decades before I was even born. But I can say it with certainty.

"Nothing gold can stay," he wrote as the finishing line to one of his most famous poems, a line that also serves as the poem's title. I think I needn't repeat the entirety of it to you as it is ingrained in most of our brains from continual studying of it in all levels of school. It's a simple eight-lined poem written in iambic trimeter, and the words used aren't difficult for even a middle school student to fully comprehend.

But unless you put the poem under a thick magnifying glass, the meaning behind what Frost is trying to portray is somewhat unclear. And even then, myself having done such on multiple occasions, I find myself rearranging or, at times, completely changing my opinion of what his words entitle. Sometimes the poem can make me feel simple sadness for only a moment, and other times, it instead engenders a sense of hope for future generations and for my own, and other times still, a sense of despondency will wash over me as I realize Frost to be saying it to be impossible for any person, man or woman, black or white, to keep that golden sheen on his rosy cheeks, a shine that every baby, no matter his parent's wishes or creed, is born into this world with. The last of these explanations is my current belief, or opinion if you will, as to what the poem truly means.

There are few in this world who remain golden which is why Frost does not say "Nature's most *impossible* hue to hold." I am not one of those people and neither are you. It is quite ironic, actually, that those who *do* stay golden in the real world are often considered the unluckiest people of all, the

poor souls that either Nature or Fate decided to curse. But that is not the case. Those who stay gold forever are the happiest and most fulfilled people in the world whether they, or the rest of us, acknowledge it or not.

The first person I knew, or at least the first I remember, that had the luxury of staying golden was my best friend when I was five-years-old. She was an Asian girl, considerably shorter than I at that age, and had black, straight hair that fell to her shoulders like a thin cloak with bangs that reached the top of her eyebrows. Her skin was a pristine milky-white as if she were made of the lightest color of chocolate, having not yet been tainted by the filth of the world.

What I remember most about her other than her appearance, however, was her addiction to the Gameboy her older brother gave her. She was always glued to that little machine, and there was nothing I could do to pry her from it. When she wasn't playing on it, she was talking about it, using strange words and phrases that I still do not understand. Her brother even bought her a jacket with characters from her favorite game on its back and down its sleeves. She never took it off. After a year of wearing it, you'd have thought it to be decades old with numerous tears, stains, and discolorations.

The reason I remember her in such vivid detail after these many years is because of her monument, standing tall and majestic where she has rested all this time. The monument is beautiful, and each time I visit her, I find something new about it that brings a tear to my eye. She is sitting upon a mossy bench with her Gameboy laid out on her leg. She is leaning forward, her hair covering her eyes, and inspecting the screen in a meticulous sort of way as if debating over her next course of action. Angelic wings are wrapped around her, sprouting from the base of the statue and *not* her back. She was never an angel. She was a human. The wings are there, shielding her from the oppressive sun and the

elements so that her Gameboy will always be safe and dry, so that she can continue on into the next life, playing various games for as long as eternity lasts.

The things I do remember about her in life are few. I remember her great smile, her teeth naturally straight, when she looked up to me. Her eyes were a dark brown, almost black, but whenever she laughed or giggled, the sky overhead seemed to clear up and the sun opened its arms wide to envelope her. Her irises sparkled with green and gold.

The meaning behind Frost's poem is often considered as a loss of innocence, a coming of age fact that nobody can step aside from. While I think this to be true to a certain extent, I believe that it is only *partially* true. People tend to forget that Frost talks about *two* colors, green and gold, and never uses them interchangeably. In literary terms, green and gold mean different things but are often paired together like fraternal twin sisters.

It *is* possible to lose your greenery while keeping a semblance of your golden shine, although it is highly improbable and oftentimes the result of an unfortunate turn of events. But remaining green is impossible, unless, quite sadly, you meet a fate similar to my best friend in kindergarten.

Now, I knew of somebody, in high school, who lost his green touch but had somehow kept his golden glimmer. I should state that most people in high school are at the turning point in their lives, losing both the gold and the green that had filled their hearts up until that point. Other more unlucky children lost one or the other beforehand and learned the weight of an adult's heart.

I remember the boy's physical stature and appearance quite well as, still to this day even, it seemed peculiar. There's no better way than to say he was a small man. He was short for a boy, barely taller than I when he stood straight. He was not muscular in the slightest, and it seemed that even his

bones were tiny in size. I wouldn't have been surprised if I saw a twelve-year-old with the same build as he, and I wouldn't be any more surprised if I could've picked him up with ease. His brown hair was buzzed, and he had a thin beard tracing the outline of his square jaw, the only mark of his being a man of age.

This boy and I shared a physics class together in the eleventh grade which is where we met when we were unceremoniously paired together for a project. From the start, I knew that the boy would be lazy beyond comprehension as every time I happened to look at him in class, he was either dozing off or staring blankly at the ceiling. He was even worse than I expected, however. He did nothing and could not add anything intellectually that I was unable to comprehend or remember. He was an idiot, put simply, and I remember one day, after class, being so frustrated that I thought to myself, "I just cannot wait to order fries from him in five years!"

While this comment, I now realize, is both rude and inconsiderate, it is unfortunately true. When I looked at him, his face seemed empty, his eyes sparkling with idiocy.

After a week of near-stagnant work, I was sure that my entire aura reeked of petulance. The week was over, yes, but my torture had only begun as I had to spend my Saturday at his house in order to complete our project. I swallowed my irritability on my drive to his house, preparing to spend a couple of agonizing hours in his annoying presence.

But when I arrived at his house, my opinion of him, and the others like him in the world, changed forever. He was outside, not waiting for me but playing with his younger brother and sister. He held his sister at the wrists and was swinging her in a circle in the middle of his front yard. She yapped so loudly with delight that I could even hear her from inside my car. His little brother danced about the yard, his smile reaching from ear to ear, and asked every ten seconds if it was his turn yet.

Most peculiar of all, however, was the strange look on the boy's, my partner's, face. I sat there in my car for at least a couple seconds in utter confusion. His face mirrored his siblings'. It was strange. A teenager looking as exuberant and carefree as a nine or ten-year-old? My brain could not comprehend the spectacle happening before me. Most teenagers *dread* playing with their younger siblings, and I remember quite vividly my older sister voicing her disgust at wasting her time playing with me. But the boy's expression was happy; it was an unadulterated happiness as if he were ten years younger.

That's when it hit me. That sparkle in his eyes that I had labeled as idiocy, I had seen it before. My best friend who died in kindergarten had that same look in her dark-brown eyes. To me, his eyes twinkled with emptiness, pure stupidity, but it was just something I did not understand before that moment. It was the mark of a child.

As he twirled his sister round and round, the sun stared into his eyes at differing angles, sending golden rays in all directions, infecting any who was struck with childlike jubilation. It was an ignorant happiness that only an empty mind, a childish mind, could experience, a happiness that Frost had labeled as "Gold."

I learned then that when I was angry at the "stupid" boy, it was not *anger* that I was feeling; it was envy. It was envy crying out within me that I had lost that golden shimmer in my eyes, unlike him, and that I would never be able to savor such pure joy.

The boy was – and probably still is – stupid. There's no going around this fact. He is another one of those unfortunate individuals I told you of. He will never be a doctor, a lawyer, or a business man, no, but he will be a *person*, a person capable of something more desirable than the success we define as the pinnacle of any man or woman's life.

I walked to his door with a tear in my eye.

“Are you okay?” he asked as I approached.

“Just allergies,” I replied with a wave of my hand. I forced the best smile I could manage, but deep down I knew that it would never be as great or as real as any half-hearted smirk of his.

As we get older, our minds becomes polluted with such words as “petulance,” “jubilation,” and “despondency” – all of which I have used in this memoir to you. But to a golden mind, a forever childish but happy mind, the words “good” and “bad” suffice as that is what every large word traces its roots back to. To have a young mind is to have a simple mind. Children are not often concerned with the everyday woes of the adult world and neither is it forced upon them. They think only of clouds and butterflies and knights and princesses.

That is the true meaning of being golden. The high school boy I told you of will never be as golden as a child since he will have responsibilities when he becomes independent: rent, a job, and having to look after his children if he ever starts a family. To remain golden, you must think only of dreams and daydreams and not be disturbed by the trifles of the waking world. And that is impossible for most people.

It can only happen to a child that is forced to walk around in an adult’s body.

I will tell you of one last person, a person who remained golden and was, quite possibly, the unluckiest of them all.

After graduating high school, I took a few turns in my life that I still regret. I decided to abandon my comfortable life in the suburbs and moved to the daunting city. As I did not have any sort of education beyond high school, I took a dead-end job at a corner store in a rather *uncomfortable* part of town.

That is where I first met this – dare I say – *man*, when he came in. He was of average-height with pockets of fat at the sides of his stomach and hugging his thighs and calves, but his arms were skinny and smooth. When I first saw him, I thought if he put his arms straight above his head, he'd look like an upside-down Popsicle. He had orange hair that was a massive tangle atop his head, and it didn't help that it was naturally curly. On Mondays, he'd be clean shaven, but by Saturday he had an eyebrow-raising red beard that, if he managed it, would be full and thick. To top it off, he wasn't one for cleanliness as he most always reeked of sweat and, even at the age of twenty, had repulsive red spots littering his forehead and cheeks.

It was my second day on the job when he came in for the first time. He ambled to the counter in an aloof sort of way, walking on the sides of his feet with a slight but noticeable limp. He stared at the camera situated above me with a grin on his face. With a sudden and swift movement, his head shot to the television where the security footage played. He frowned as if disappointed that he hadn't caught himself staring at the camera. He chuckled and directed his attention back toward the counter.

"I'd like two, please, ma'am," he said, his voice quiet and breathy. He nudged two packs of gum and a crumpled five-dollar bill toward me. His hand was sweaty and shined with a layer of sweat.

I grinned. "Of course, *sir*," I replied.

His face beamed, revealing a set of crooked yellow teeth in the most carefree smile I had ever seen. When I handed him the bag and his change, he seemed to bounce on his toes with animation before starting toward the door in an upbeat manner, his limp still evident, with an energetic wave.

"Goodbye!" he called out and disappeared with the ringing of the bell atop the door.

It wasn't until the second time I met him, two days later, that I noticed his eyes. I guess I was too consumed by the initial shock of meeting such a happy individual to see something so glaring. His eyes

were a sky blue with what seemed to be patterns like spider-webs stretched across his irises. And they were empty. When I stared into them, I stared directly into his soul. I knew immediately whether he was lying or whether he was being sincere or whether he was teasing me. He was a carefree child in an already clumsy twenty-year-old body. He was a golden boy.

“Oh the retard that comes every other day to buy candy?” my manager said once when I told him of the boy, or man – I’m not sure what to call him. “He’s a nice kid, but he’s just so God damn stupid.”

Two days later, the boy happened to arrive just as my shift ended. He waved to me with his usual fervor and sprang over as if he was hopping. Quite innocently, he asked why I wasn’t behind the counter. He was most surprised to hear that I was done working and that I was an *actual* person with other things to do than stand behind a counter all day.

“I’ll walk home with you since I’m off work if you’d like.”

He gasped, his eyes brightening as if a light had been flicked on. “Would you really?” he asked in a somewhat confused but energetic manner.

“Of course!” I responded, mirroring his buoyancy.

I helped him pick out his candy for that day, two chocolate bars, one with almonds and the other with caramel. When I held the door for him, he shuffled outside, mumbling his thanks as he stuffed the entire caramel-covered chocolate bar into his face. He swallowed after taking only four bites, and started to walk in an exaggerated way, extending his legs as far as possible with each step. It was hard to keep up with him since I was at least four inches shorter than he and had a much less impressive stride.

“Do you know where dragons live?” he asked suddenly.

“Dragons?” His question caught me off guard.

“Yes, dragons!” He slowed some as if that energy had been fueled into speaking.

“I ... I don’t think so? Where do they live?”

“*Middle Earth*, of course!” he burst out as his arms waved wildly through the air. “Everybody knows that, *Miss*! They live in mountains where they guard their treasure from greedy dwarves and goblins!” He nodded his head as if he approved of what he had just said.

I giggled. “I didn’t know that, *Mister*.”

He continued on for the remainder of our walk, going on and on about how there were eight continents, not seven, and how one of them was Tolkien’s *Middle Earth*. In the kingdoms of *Middle Earth*, there were elves and hobbits and dwarves and evil things like orcs and goblins. He was sure that one day, when he had enough money, he’d buy a ticket for a boat-ride to this fantastical land.

I didn’t realize we had reached his apartment complex when he stopped midsentence and charged into the building, dropping our previous conversation in an instant.

“Goodbye!” he shouted with a wave. He slipped from view, making sure that his hand was still visible around the corner to continue waving for as long as possible.

The next time I saw him, he was bleeding. It was fresh blood, dripping from a busted lip as his eye began to swell shut. But that wasn’t the worst part. From his eyes, streams of sparkling water trickled down his red cheeks and joined the small rivers of his blood. Clouds the color of onyx plagued those spider-webbed eyes, their shine lost. His limp became worse, his voice soft and distant once again.

“Oh my God!” I gasped. “What happened to you, honey?!”

My question didn't even faze him. He started to peruse the selection of candy at the counter with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. He retrieved a small bag of sour gummies and slid it over to me.

"I'd like this, please," he whispered in a hoarse voice.

It took me a moment to realize that he didn't pass over a five-dollar bill, and it took me another moment to realize *why* he didn't.

I couldn't control the tears that formed in my eyes. I raced over to him, grabbed his wrist, and sat him on a stool behind the counter. I reached for the first-aid kit, next to the baseball bat, and placed it on my lap. I started wiping the blood from his face and put Band-Aids across his cuts and bruises. He remained quiet the entire time, staring at a single point on the ceiling

My co-worker appeared from the back after refilling the soda-dispenser. He gave my frantic face a cursory look and then glanced to the boy. "Happens about once a month," he grumbled with an indifferent shrug.

"I'm leaving for thirty minutes to walk him home," I told him strongly.

"Boss will be mad."

"I don't care!"

I was up on my feet the next moment, interlocking my fingers with the boy's, and was out the door the next, the bag of sour candy lying forgotten on the counter. Outside, the air felt particularly heavy.

A group of men draped in the shadows of the rising sun stood by the corner of the store. They were large men with dead faces, hollow expressions, and aggressive postures. Their eyes fluttered over

me and settled on the boy beside me. I heard a snicker or two but nothing became of it. But I did see, however, that one of them held a crumpled five-dollar-bill in his greasy hands.

The walk to his apartment was eerily quiet. No stories of dragons lurking in mountains or dwarves trying to kill said dragons. Nothing. There was nothing but silence, cold whispering silence.

I looked over to the boy. I found it strange – and still find it so – that I had to look *up* at him to look him in the eye. How could a *child* be so tall? How could anybody do such a thing to a *child*? Who had doomed such a pure and innocent life to a terrible world, a world with no dragons and with no dwarves?

When we reached his apartment building, he pulled away from my hand as if trying to rid himself of a burden, but I gripped tighter. I turned him round and grabbed his other hand as well. He tried to avert his gaze from mine, but eventually my relentless stare got the better of him. He looked at me, tears forming in the corners of his eyes.

“Wait for me here tomorrow at six-thirty,” I told him, my tone sincere and warm. “You didn’t get candy today, so tomorrow I’ll walk with you to the store, okay?”

He didn’t do anything for a moment, not blink or sway on his feet, as he stared down at me. Clouds still cast shadows across his eyes, but I could see the infectious light of a child returning.

“Okay,” he said finally with a nod of his head.

I let go of his hands and let my arms drop back down to my sides. He limped to the front of his apartment building but stopped at the door.

“Thank you, Lady.”

“You’re welcome.”

I'm still not sure why I ever bestowed such a benevolent act upon a special boy whom I barely knew. I had told myself when I first moved to the city to *not* get involved with the gangs littering the streets, and there I was, defying them as if I was going to change the world. But I had to do it. It was partially because of a stupidity I held inside my heart, thinking that they *wouldn't* touch me because I was a woman, but I had forgotten that the existence of chivalry had died long ago with my dreams of knights and princesses.

I found the boy waiting outside his apartment complex the next day, my chivalrous knight. He greeted me with his yellow smile and skipped toward me, his plight from the day prior forgotten. But the scars remained on his face, his lip busted and his left eye swollen shut. I took hold of his hand and began walking down the street.

"Did you know that elves live for thousands of years?!" the boy asked me, his face bright.

I chuckled. "No, I didn't. I wish I was an elf, then."

He continued after that, talking more and more about the eighth continent that he was sure existed. "And dwarf women grow beards as well as the men! And the boys start growing their beards at twelve or even younger sometimes!"

"I'd hate to be a dwarf then," I said with a laugh.

"Yeah, really."

His voice quieted as we neared the last turn to the corner store. I could feel his grip tightening, sweat trickling between our fingers. I prayed that the coast would be clear since it was so early in the morning, but I was to be proven wrong yet again.

Leaning against the wall of the store was a man, no older than twenty-five, with a scar running from just about mid-cheek to his collar bone. He had a lean build, as if he was half-starved, but I could see the muscles lining his forearms. His eyes were a dead black, and he stared directly at us, the corners of his lips tugging into a malicious grin.

I felt the boy try to stop, but I kept ushering him forward, whispering that it would all be okay.

“I’m here with you. He won’t hurt you, I swear.”

“Okay.”

As we neared the frightening man, he pushed off from the wall and strolled towards us, his thumbs hooked in his pockets. When he stood only a couple of feet from us, I could see that the whites of his eyes were actually a bright red. He put his hand up and let out a short laugh.

“I’m gonna need my five dolla’s if you wanna get by, *retard*.”

I felt the boy shrink beside me. I grabbed tighter until I’m sure my knuckles turned white. “We need to get by,” I said bluntly as I brushed past the man.

I don’t quite remember what happened after that as it was just a giant blur. But the next thing I knew, I was lying on the ground, my head spinning and my right breast exploding with pain. The aching in my cheek became evident a moment later when I felt warm liquid crawl down my face. Unable to catch my breath, I coughed and sputtered on the concrete.

“I’m gonna take ten dolla’s then since his momma wants in as well,” I heard the man say.

I could barely think, my chest still screaming with pain as my lungs refused to fill up with air. My brain seemed to detect the man tapping his foot, signaling his impatience and the possibility for his violent urges to return. My hand acted, as if it was familiar with the situation, and took my wallet from

my back pocket. I threw a handful of insignificant bills at the man before I doubled over with pain once again.

He left with a chuckle, stepping over me as if there were no other way for him to go. I winced when he was directly over me, but he didn't strike again. He left me there, sobbing on the concrete.

I hadn't questioned where the boy had gone until I felt a gentle tap on my shoulder. I forced my head up to see the boy leaning over me. The wound on his lip had reopened as fresh blood caked his chin. I didn't remember the man assaulting him as well. But his eyes, those golden and pure eyes, stared down at me with a child's exhilaration.

"Ma'am! You have to open the doors! You have to! You have to! You have to! You have the new gum! The new gum that tastes like chocolate! I've seen in on TV! You have to open the doors!"

He hopped over to the window and cupped his hands to peer inside, obviously not concerned about his lip's wound. He whined like a dog and bounced on his feet as if he needed to use the bathroom. He pressed his finger to the glass, pointing most likely to the candy.

When he looked back to me, the sun's first touch burst over the horizon. The light struck the boy's eyes in such a way that it seemed to be diamonds arranged in his eye sockets, taking the sun's rays and bending them into beautiful designs of yellow and orange snowflakes. The red glow reached out from the boy's beaming face and picked me up, like the hand of God, and made me forget all about the pain stabbing into my body. I walked over to the doors and unlocked them as the boy, the aloof twenty-year-old boy, danced with golden delight.

Nothing Gold can Stay

*"Nature's first green is gold,
Her hardest hue to hold.
Her early leaf's a flower;
But only so an hour.
Then leaf subsides to leaf.
So Eden sank to grief,
So dawn goes down to day.
Nothing gold can stay."*

- Robert Frost