

JENNIFER SPERRY STEINORTH

**A Triste Little Tryst w/R. Frost**  
**select billets-doux**

Dear Mr. Frost,

I hope this finds you well, in your little well. Or is it more like a mine?  
I wonder if you've time to speak with me about poetry and accessibility.

I'm a midlife poet flirting with crisis. More or less.

Penevieve S

Dear Penevieve S,

I've nothing but time.

Do you cook?

Robert F

Dear Robert,

Last night was lovely.... (sigh)....  
lovely....

But I don't love your poems! Theirs is an old romance—  
besotted with...

Or maybe they're just hard for me.

Also, I'm married. Please advise.

—P

My dear Pen,

Yes, it was.

That's fine.

Sure they are.

So am I.

R.F.

Dear Robert—

Last night's snow gathering in the window screens,  
your hands. How easily you slip away. The Living leave tracks  
in the snow.

You left your glasses.

P

Dear Guinevere,

Do you mind if I call you Guinevere?  
We could role-play "The Highwayman"—

*Watch for me by moonlight,  
I'll come to thee by moonlight*

I do a good dead guy. So can you.

F

Dear Robert,

I think of you constantly.  
Do you think of me?

Make X for Yes. Make O for yes.

PS

My dear—

I am very sorry. When we meet, I think only of your body  
of work. Mine is all I have left. Everyone here is dead.  
There are no chairs. No ankles. No vacant dresses.

To embrace the living, dead, is not living. To embrace  
the dead, living, is yet living.

Earn your living. Earn your debts.

Yours,  
F

Dear Robert,

I have never carried a milk bucket. I love my husband, but he doesn't love poetry. Not even a little. When you look in my eyes, do you see a woman? Or a poem? What does the woman want? A poem? I can only be seen when my household is asleep. Also, he doesn't dance. Fuck Billy Elliot. And Tom Eliot. Fuck Billy Yeats and Billy Collins and fuck you, too—so goddam accessible, no one can get close to you.

In your lifetime were you known?

PenS

Dear PenS,

Fuck who?  
Please advise.

yR. F.

R

When a woman sits on a man's lap, how many pears should they halve?

P

Oh, Pen.

It's over.

Love,  
Frost

PS. Just kidding.  
But it's snowing here.  
Just kidding.

Dear Robert,

You scarcely speak for weeks—I think you do not love me—  
then there you are in the back-door rain pleading—*Write me! Write me!*

What am I to make of these moods?

Yours confused,

PS

Dear Robert,

Have I mentioned my sons?  
Sometimes I beget. Then I worry about raising sons while bedding Robert  
Frost. Pardon me putting you in third person, but surely you realize—  
you're an institution. My sons have a mother who's institutionalized.

Some people think poets are free. Is this true?

Yours,

P

P—

I'm dead.

RF

Robert, darling—

This may sting—but I've fallen for Creeley.

P.S. I bought a new nightie.

Dear RF,

I never have so many buttons as when I'm with you.

Lucite, Bakelite, mother-of-pearl, ivory, glass, bone.  
And yours—so many sheaths—so long to release you.

Released, then oh—*So long*, you cry—too quick!—

Dear F,

How do you breach the wall between us? Must you pace the length  
probing for a crumbling? Avoid border control? Dogs? And who,  
after it's mused, is responsible for the wall's repairing?

P

Dear F,

Sometimes when I call it just rings and rings.

Dear P,

I know. Isn't it wonderful?

Dear Robert,

Weeks, months—watching for you—nothing. What keeps you?  
I walk the field to the end of it, run my hands along the wall,  
slipshod stones unclick to season the vagrant grass. Beyond  
the wall, not so high as my breast, another field yields to a line  
of firs. Late summer cool. Early fall. Hunting seasons. One game,  
then another. Buckshot. Upflush of pheasant. The hunched blue  
trees. Their blue backs.

Dear Robert,

Before you come, I think you will not come. After you are gone I think you will not come again.

Please advise.

Pen

Dear Pen—

I'll see you tonight— Melody Freeze, at 8?  
I'll be late.

R.F.

Dear R—

Sometimes when I'm with you you're very old and sometimes young. Do you feel the changing? I see your face transform in my hands from a man of forty-five to eighty-eight to a weeks-old child—Do we live with all our ages within us? Dying—do we pour them out till there are none? Or wear them all at once? And this always—how long will it come between us?

P—no idea.  
Frost

Dear Robert,

You are reunited with your wife. And a thousand queens, magicians, scholars, dancers besides. And Emily and Rainy and Aunt Gert and beloved C.D. Even you and I will be reconciled in ecstatic oblivion eventually. Why this howling?

Was your love ever false? Did she withhold the favorite dish—serving instead a thin broth cold?

I sent love away. Was angry. My house, no longer my house, is empty. Children, husband, mother, friends—gone to the movies. A mystery. And when the culprit is finally caught—what will her sentence be?