

## Arcady

Michael South

*Inspired by Edwin Arlington Robinson's "Ballade of Broken Flutes"*

He'd told me of a hallowed land  
Through old words on an ancient page.  
I traveled there, and it was grand,  
Although the landscape reeked of age.  
The once-blue sky, now tainted beige,  
Was scattered far as I could see,  
And on the ground, laid there by rage,  
Was one old flute from Arcady.

I stooped down, brushed away the dust  
And found the flute split clean in two.  
The wood had rot, the metal, rust,  
And dirt and pebbles filled the tube.  
I thought of nothing else to do  
And took the flute along with me,  
Walked onwards towards the sky once-  
blue,  
Walked onwards towards old Arcady.

And as I walked, the images  
Of desolation and decay  
Told stories of what pillage is  
When nature comes into the fray.  
And though the silence day by day  
Relieved my mind to some degree,  
The lifelessness in every way  
Could not spell peace for Arcady.

Then after all my strength was spent  
And Arcady still far away,  
I questioned why I ever went  
And what could come of that foray.  
Nearby the road, a cold and gray  
Old tree stump offered sympathy  
For my worn feet. What would I pay  
To catch a glimpse of Arcady?

And for what seemed a century,  
I sat there fingering the flute,  
But as I thought, eventually  
An idea started taking root:

If gold is gold, though stained by soot,  
Then surely such the case may be,  
That though it looked dead, underfoot  
There flourished mighty Arcady!

My strength renewed, my vision cleared,  
I persevered at steady pace;  
My labored trudging disappeared  
And airy footsteps took its place,  
For one hope looked me in the face  
And whispered with unbridled glee,  
"Press on, for he who runs the race  
Will find it all in Arcady!"

At long last, I stepped on the grounds,  
The land where once lived mighty folk  
In kingdoms bold and homes so sound  
That just the thought of them evoke  
The scent of freshly lacquered oak  
Inside the house of Medici...  
Alas! But that was long ago,  
An old, forgotten Arcady.

That day, the ground on which I stood  
Was battered far beyond belief:  
Where houses were, now splintered wood  
Served to remind me of the grief  
That took the land. A withered leaf  
Brushed by me in the solemn breeze,  
And I thought, "This can't be the chief  
End of a place like Arcady!"

I traveled home with no more loot  
Than what was in that sorry tomb,  
And on my mantle lies the flute  
That no more carries on a tune.  
I took to writing, not too soon—  
For every sonnet that I sing  
Brings one dead flower back to bloom  
In Arcady, my Arcady.