The Laureates

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6519

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The Laureates

“Why don’t they just stay home?”
—Anna Akhmatova

When Robert Frost, on his trip to Russia, stood by the side of Anna Akhmatova
as she showed him the forest, they gazed at the pines and she read him her poem,
“The Last Rose,” and Frost turned to her and asked how much money could be made
by turning those trees into pencils. “Not possible,” she replied. “There’s a law!”
Later she said she had been embarrassed that a poet should ask such a question.

“Why don’t these businessmen stay home?” she asked, then sighed and said, “Banality
will be the death of me. This is enough to confirm what Count Tolstoy once said
about poets, that they are like plowmen plowing along and bobbing every second
or third step.” As Anna and Robert stood gazing into the forest of pines a boy holding
the rope of his sled asked whose grandpa and grandma they were and why they
were looking at pines, and what had they lost?