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# Pro Rege

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## Need

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# Need

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*Robert J. De Smith*

(for my parents on their 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary)

I'm just getting comfortable  
On Dad's tall stepladder  
When he asks it—  
“Do you need me for anything?”

I look down—I smile  
(I think I did)  
Paint brush poised  
Like I'm going to  
Do his portrait  
(He's in a white T-shirt and blue shorts)  
Instead of finishing the top two  
Courses of the oversized  
Garage doors.

“No, I'm all right.”

It's true, it's what you say;  
It's true.

But,  
“Do you need me for anything?”

Not ten minutes later,  
There's Mom at the base of the ladder—  
She didn't sneak up on me,  
Not like the summer when  
My brother and I  
Succeeded in taking all season  
To paint these same doors  
Tom Sawyer white.

“Do you need me for anything?”

“No—I'm fine.”

But,  
“Do you need me for anything?”

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When I'm alone,  
I want to scream,  
"Yes—I need you for everything!"

I know the score:  
In your mid-seventies  
Dad can't breathe  
Mom can't move  
As you'd like.

I'm not independent—  
Donne's "No man is an island."

I need you because you are my memory:

Of beaches and motorcycles  
And Cokes with peanuts and McDonald's  
Served on cake pans in wide back seats  
And noon whistles  
And the Heidelberg Catechism and fire trucks  
And lawn mowers and an old aunt  
Climbing the stairway, her glasses steaming up  
From a gift of pigs-in-the-blanket.

I need you because you are my wisdom:

Of car brakes and college careers  
Of funerals and even my wife of just 22 years  
(To your 50).

Atop the ladder, I have two thoughts:

I know—thinking of my own—  
How hard it is  
To relent being needed  
("I can do it, Dad")  
To relent protecting,  
To relent being strong.

And this:  
While I said I don't need you,  
I hope you need me,  
But it's small payment on a large debt.