

## Forest Walk®

I take my reluctant midnight leave from the big log house in the woods, soaking in the companionable yellow light streaming from its many windows as I close the door smiling.

I begin to walk, treading carefully now, as the shadowy silhouette of the house fades behind me in the growing darkness.

Soon the lighted windows no longer afford illumination, and only a paltry light helps my feet find the path.

I depart to find quiet shelter in my warm bed, which waits, some distance away, housed in my own welcoming cabin.

Slowly the laughter of friends fades as did the light, and I traverse unaccompanied on the darkening path to my cozy cabin retreat, thickly surrounded and guarded by droves of slender lodge pole pine trees.

I know no better sentinels; tall and straight, silent and grouped together, they stand as if to remind me that I am in their charge, and all is well.

At first the foreign woodsy darkness stimulates my wakefulness, and I begin to doubt the loyalty of my watchful pines.

I am increasingly alert to the unpredictability of the meandering lane, to the sounds of the scramble and scurrying of unseen creatures seeking their safety in the witching hour, even as I seek mine, and to unseen streams flowing eternally down hill.

I hear the gentle protestations of my pine guardians as they creak and groan, swaying slightly in the cool night breeze which nudges their topmost branches, urging them to abandon solemnity, and come and play.

Halfway home now, I do not hear or see any man-made thing.

I am neither part of the company of friends, held by their love and proffering of warm tea and generously inclusive smiles, nor am I yet untroubled in my protected bed.

I stop. I am in the neither-here-nor-there space, like sitting on a landing perched between floors.

I look up, and the light of numberless stars bursts lustily through pinprick openings in the inky shroud of the night sky.

So many do I see. And they are no longer made shy by the overpowering bully lights of the city. Instead they are free to sing in their own place, in their own way, right here unmolested and deep in the woods.

If I narrow my eyes and wait until the wind wanes, I can see through the bushes in the distance some occasional beckoning shards of light which stream through the front window of my cabin, calling to me with downy yellow rays that softly fall on the earth next to my door.

Safety and love are behind, safety and shelter are ahead, but here between these two ports, lives an ocean of the unknown, an ocean of darkness and loneliness and possibility.

At first I shiver slightly from the awareness of how suddenly I have entered the wild, how easily all of the artifice and pretensions of man's accomplishments can slip away.

But then by grace, my heart opens to the shimmering symphony of the darkness, the solitary oneness of this moment.

I now stand like my pines, stock-still and rooted in the earth of my own being, yet open to the breezes of life and love in my own branches.

I smell the wet greenness of the fecund forest floor.

My eyes receive the glittering light of the merry stars like a still lake receives the moon's cool caress on its surface.

As my lips part, I taste the wind on my tongue; I feel the eternity of this place through the soles of my feet.

In a flash, I become aware of how much I belong to this Earth, to these stars, to this wind, to my trees.

I become aware of how very right this moment is and always was.

I am not, I realize, actually caught between the pseudo separate worlds of me and other, light and dark, safety and danger.

I am simply here and now.

I am both living fully and dying gently to my fears, all at once.

Then those fears desert me completely, unable to stand and fight against the sweetness I now recognize as contentedness that fully fills my heart.

In gratitude I commence walking, knowing unshakably that with each footfall, whichever way I walk, forward or back, I am always walking in the direction of home.

Reaching my cabin door, I place my hand on the doorknob, pause, turn, and looking over my shoulder, blow a grinning kiss to my pines.