

Only the Trees

The temperature rose dramatically over the weekend. I had no plans to speak of, which was just fine...I'd go wherever my whims led me.

And so with the sweltering heat, I found myself wandering down a dusty path between tall trees, toward a hidden beach, where I'd rarely ever seen people go. I walked the steep trail carrying my towel, my book, and a large bottle of cold beer, hoping to enjoy a few hours' peace. Through the webbing of green boughs ahead, the lake could be descried in all its cool, jeweled brilliance, lapping at the rocks. On through the shady canopy I trekked, till I came to a place where I'd finally settle.

There was a massive tree, which had fallen in a storm some time back, and was now lying on its side in the rolling waters. I threw my towel upon the stones and had a seat next to the bathing tree.

I supped of my beer, smacking my lips with delight! I opened my book and read about the Yepanchin family and Prince Myshkin's first meeting with the general...

In my element, you could say!

When the sun had warmed me to a crisp, and my flesh was beaded just as much as the bottle of beer, I felt it was high time to take a dip. So I removed my shirt and waded out in the chilly waves until they splashed against my chest. Then I lowered myself under, paddling out a great distance through the brackish water.

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At one point I let my legs come up, so that I could float on my back, my mind lost in dreaming.

When I finally felt sated, refreshed by the water, I swam to shore to resume my reading and drinking.

I towed off my sopping head and took a drink. Then I cracked my book and began to read once more. Though invested in the story, my mind soon began to wander until I remembered an amusing event from my past...

I was in Canada at the time, staying in a rented cottage on the mountainside of a ski resort. It was summer then, so instead of being blanketed in snow and ice, the slopes were now furred in golden grass and sprinkled with wild flowers. The sky was powder blue, and fluffy white clouds went grazing across azure, now and then shading the sun.

I packed a shoulder bag, with my notebook and a few bottles of beer – then struck off – and in no time at all, I was hiking up the steep slope over grasses and rocks. On and on I climbed...till I heard something in the distance. Hmm. Is that? Yes: a gurgling creek in a patch of tall evergreens off to the side. Like siren songs, the babbling waters drew me into the forest, where I found a handsome boulder, overlooking the creek bed, on which I sat down to compose my poems.

What a treat! Cold beer, creek songs, and my pen possessed by the spirits of the mountain...how I could I deign to ask for more?

A good while into my revelry, I felt a presence nearby – something curious and alive! I glanced further down the rushing creek and found a pair of brown eyes gazing back at me.

A black bear cub, there to lap at the cold mountain stream!

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He seemed almost to ask my permission to stay a while, so that he could get his fill of the water. My heart answered for me. The young cub lowered his black nose to the creek, his pink tongue splashing thirstily at the icy flow.

Though a glorious sight, I knew full well that wherever there was a cub, its mother couldn't be far behind. In matters of man and beast, it's never wise to get between a mother and her young.

And how!

Not knowing what else to do, I stayed my ground atop the boulder, my whole body consumed by an inner peace that betrayed good sense. And pretty soon the cub had finished drinking. He looked up. And I could swear he gave me a thankful grimace, just before crossing the creek to go ambling along the mountainside.

I waited.

The mother never came. She must've been there – she must've smelled me a mile off! Don't ask me why. Though for some reason she had not considered me a threat.

An hour later I had finished my work, as well as my bottles of beer, and so went about packing my bag and making my way back down to the cottage, my spirit aglow with gratitude and wonder.

Descending the grassy slopes, I saw the gray peaks of surrounding mountains, girding the horizon wherever I looked...

Remembering this now by the water's edge, I chuckled to myself. Not long after this reflection I closed my book.

The sun was going down.

I decided to make the trek back up the dusty path for my truck, and then for home.

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But why *hadn't* I been mauled back then? I wondered, marching up the hillside.

Hmm. Perhaps when a man learns to forget the sillier things in life, he is able to remember the right things? And if he does this – well then, could he become just as much a part of nature as the bears, the trees, and the four winds?

That's what it was. Yes, that...

And that alone, which granted me life.

By the time that I pulled into the driveway, the sun was merely a red sliver behind the buildings of the city.

I can't say why it happened but at one point during the night, long after having put myself to bed, I awoke, and found myself in the calm bosom of darkness. I looked around, seeing nothing. I didn't feel the least bit tired, nor was I unhappy. In fact I felt radiant with life, maybe a bit meditative.

It was stuffy in my room, so I threw off my blankets and got out of bed.

Then, as if silently beckoned, I went to the window, pushing it open and taking a deep gulp of the brisk night air snaking through the trees outside.

Not content to stay there behind the sill, I climbed out of the house, feeling the sharp gravel under my bare feet – for some reason finding it lovely. I ventured forth with soft steps, the gravel emitting the faint sound of crunching snow under my footfalls.

My gods! I thought, when sighting the full moon above.

White as bones, white as the curses of angels, she shone motherly, in a skirt of muslin clouds sailing across the night sky.

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Basking joyously in the pale light, I wandered off the gravel path and onto the dirt, where dark flowers dreamt. The palps of my bare feet were stuck with cool soil, as I plodded onward.

Ah, how many times do they occur? These moments... The soul stirred by mystical forces, summoned to forget all else, only to rejoice in silence and solitude before these visions, these primeval entities which speak their own language...

I sat down upon the dirt then, wrapping my knees in my arms, and let the wind tease my hair, on its way to wherever it is the winds like to go. Maybe only the trees can say.

There was a beautiful silence.

How many times, *indeed*...?