

In My Father's Cabin · *Kathy Engel*

Today we walked into the forest
to a place where the pines have parted
in a circle to let the light in,
where under thick green moss
is damp mulch, the sweet home.
It was so soft and moist underfoot,
you'd think anything could grow,
you'd think there was only growing
and warm. The knobs on the maples,
like chestnuts, those extra toes
on horses' legs, grow in the dark
the way things always grow and die
in the dark and you miss them.
That's why tonight I'll sit here
while everyone sleeps, and look out
at the cuts and dives on Camel's Hump
and listen to Turk's curving bark
at the foot of the hill, so nothing
no one will leave while I'm asleep.

Tonight Northern Lights streak
across a dark sky and my father
walks out of this cabin he built,
anytime, to pee anywhere he chooses,
the tap of Vermont air waking him,
waking him. Up here,
between woods and meadow,
the wind turns you like age.

Up here,
my father doesn't care what time it is,
snowshoeing up the hill in winter,
pulling his food on a sled,
or at the table writing on a yellow lined pad
the film he has always wanted to write.

Soon it will be morning
and my father will be standing at the door
asking, "Anyone feel like a little breakfast?"
and the coffee will be going
and I remember
all the mornings as a child
when I walked in my socks
straight to the telephone before breakfast
before anything
to place a collect call
just to hear his voice —
"Kath, how are you Kath?" —
just to hear the pause.

And I remember
how sometimes the only safe place
was on his shoulders, above any home.
And nights I couldn't sleep,
so tired from walking the bridge
back and forth in the dark
from mother to father.

This night
I choose to stay awake
while shadows of the old trees
are taken up as young ones get tall,
and the blight nearly over,
maple leaves point everywhere,
flushed, about to flame out.
This night
there is no bridge — footless, obsolete.
The walls have not shot up.

This late September night in my 22nd year
my father and his wife lie sleeping in the other room,
my love sleeps here on the floor in his sleeping bag
and I see again
soon it will be light out.