

A Walk in the Woods

By Ember Westerhof

My boots made a satisfying crunching sound when they struck the frozen ground. I walked forward barely thinking, just enjoying the rhythmic sound of snow compacting under my boots against the suffocating silence brought on by the fresh snowfall. Pulling my gaze from the whitened ground I looked up, admiring the beauty of the blanket of snow that fell overnight in comparison to the dark wood of the great trees that towered over my head. The contrast gave the forest the look of an old picture. Small birds flitted above my head, dancing along the tree boughs and creating miniature avalanches of snow that floated slowly through the still air as if in slow motion, coming to rest on the lower branches of the tree as well as in the folds of my jacket and the ground. I had walked this path so many times before, I didn't need the soothing sound of rushing water to tell me I was nearing the creek. The splashing sound of the water sounded deafening in comparison to the hushed silence of the world around me. I stopped in my tracks to admire the water, the hypnotic way it flowed along, its surface glassy and the way it glided over rocks that had been smoothed and rounded from years of being pounded by the unstoppable force of the creek as it wove its way through the forest, heading down to the ocean. I shook my head to clear it of the mesmerizing powers of the water and carried on walking, following the creek downstream.

It wasn't long until I came to the bridge, a wooden footbridge that looked straight out of a fairy tale, hardly recognizable under the layer of snow. Crossing the bridge, I took a moment to enjoy looking down into the rushing water, feeling the light mist hit my face. It wasn't long till the sound of water faded from my hearing as I continued down the path and I was again surrounded by silence. That silence, was soon broken by the sharp crack of a stick snapping. I looked up to see a young doe standing about twenty feet ahead of me on the trail. It was a very beautiful animal, well fed with a glossy hazel coat and a white underbelly. It raised its head and looked at me, its large ears flicking slightly. Not thinking, I raised my foot to take another step toward the deer, but before I could bring my foot down it turned and bounded away into the forest. I stared after the deer admiring the graceful way it bounded over the fallen logs that littered the woods. Once the deer had gone I turned my attention back to the trail and walked on.

It had just begun to snow when I reached my destination, a thicket of trees with a bench in the middle. The bench was no more than a crude wooden seat carved into the side of a large log, the remnants of a tree that once stood there. The bench was not particularly easy to get to or comfortable, but I am not the only one to go there when I need some space or fresh air, as evident by the layers of initials scratched into the wood. Sitting down on the bench I closed my eyes and listened to all the sounds

around me; the birds calling back and forth in the branches above me, the snow melting and dripping down to the ground, the sound of my breathing with each inhale and exhale, the sound of the winter wind tousling the needles at the tops of the trees. And as I sat there, feeling the gentle breeze and hearing the symphony of sound around me, I was at peace.