

## FOREST WALK ON A FRIDAY

BY LYNNE GOLODNER

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New grass, wet from the night, under a sky the blue of a baby blanket. The sun is hot and white, glittering the dewy grasses. An airplane thunders overhead. Far traffic is a river rushing.

I hide in the cool shadow of a Norway spruce. So many critters hiding in the open. Birds loud and constant, each call different, sound and purpose.

The trees have yet to awaken, but at home, the pink buds of a magnolia have burst forth, and the daffodils are full-throated.

Every time I come to the forest, it's different, but so am I. In past Aprils, I've stepped over black and white banded snakes coiling around each other. Today, I can't even find the holes they slither into.

Feather dusters of pine branches carpet the velvet ground. I follow the River Trail to the bridge, which has new, chest-height railings, the metal rusted from winter. The brown river eddies under low branches. A deer in the shallows tugs at leaves. A mate on the hill starts at a man's voice. *Shhh, quiet.* What is there to say in the forest? A third doe steps into the brush, her fan-like ears cocked, her muzzle tilting to the edible. Hooves crunching over matted ground, her black eyes lock on me, and she canters into the water, crosses to dry ground. In a moment, their brown-gray bodies disappear into the sleeping trees.

I walk on, my breathing thickens, my heart pulsing in my temples, the ratatatat of a woodpecker echoing. I go-go-go up the matted hill, thinking only about how hard it is and how far I have to go. Another plane hums overhead, a fly buzzes, circling. The air smells warm.

Skunk cabbage leaves like vulvas are coming up from the ground, soft and satin, favoring the black, water-soaked soil. One of the first spring-blooming plants, changing constantly as the year unfolds, at its heartiest, *symplocarpus foetidus* reaches nearly three feet across with giant green leaves.

I finish the River Loop, the brown ribbon sparkling in morning sun. The streams should be pulsing with runoff, but they are slow and trickling. I've been here in winter when ice cracked over black water and deer left deep prints in the snow. Then, the sun was blinding in a different way, and I could not discern between the deep cold of the season and my organic heat.

A fly alights on my page, its bulbous green body like satin, I trace its outline with my gaze, but then it lifts off and away. Back on the bridge, I can't spot the deer anywhere. I take the main trail back to where I began. This ground, flat and solid, packed in over millennia, holds me, supports me, allows me to join the knowing journey of all that lives and answers to itself.

There is activity among the trees, skittering, rustling, shuffling under ground cover, hiding in shadows, but the forest shows only what it wants me to see, never quiet, never still, living its purpose without the drag of thought or wondering.

A child clomps over a distant trail and screams. I hear him but can't see him. When I was a child, no one brought me to the forest, but I took my children there again and again, so they would never be afraid of the naked and bold world.