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# In My Father's Cabin

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## 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.