

Epitaph

He doesn't walk lightly like a god should; his boots leave prints in the hard-packed snow. He has no power to make the wind blow or the nearby river rise up in waves, but the sun glints off the snow in his hair and he looks like he's not from this world.

Gray clouds form in the cold air as he breathes, hand on his hips against the thick flannel shirt he's been wearing for years now. He's just standing and watching everything. He always tells me that everything is just like us, that the birds and the deer and the trees— he reaches out to smooth some birch bark back into place— are just like us. We're no better, no worse. Mother nature is neither for nor against us.

These woods are where he grew up, where he sat under the old pines and wrote his ideas down in an old journal, a leather bound epitaph. He clutches it now in a cold, white knuckled hand. His life is contained within the crumbling bindings of that journal, all his philosophical musings and wonders about the world around him. I don't think I've ever seen him without it. The pages are all full now, so he scribbles his ideas in the margins and in the small spaces between his other thoughts.

He starts walking again and I follow along behind, as I have for years, wondering how his claim to these woods has not yet faded. How he can return and instantly be at home in the shaking birch trees and dry, crunching leaves. How the bushes brush his ankles as if welcoming him back, how his cheeks don't become red-patched from the harsh wind like mine do.

The trees seem like they're inclining their branches towards the snow-tipped hair that dusts against his forehead, and he walks under their boughs in silence.