

Farewell, I Must Be Gone—a Reflection

by Emma Breslow

“The road is calling as leaves are falling;
It’s back to home; my travels are done now.
So I’ll sit by the fire and drink a toast to all of you;
Farewell, I must be gone.
Farewell, I must be gone...”

Round by John Krumm, “Fall (The Road Is Calling)”

Our voices mingled with the warm light of the pavilion, spreading out into the dark forest beyond and weaving into children’s dreams. The last notes drifted away across the pond and we stood in silence: fifty people, connected by our circle, there, that night, and joined by so much more. Only there amongst the pines were we surrounded by understanding. Only there did people love the traditions we loved, the song and dance that connected a community spread across two continents, spread across time, back to fifteenth century England. I looked around the circle, seeing my friends, acquaintances, and I knew even those who were strangers to me sensed the joy of dance, the energy that flowed from the dancers and band, the wordless connection and the communication through subtle signals of joined hands. We spoke a language never taught in a school. Each person felt the magic of that small dream world, where the rain made the beech leaves shine, the sharp scent of pine needles rose with the sun, and we marked each beginning and end with a song.

And now it was ending. Too few hours away, the last sunrise promised to cast golden blushes on the soft waters and feathered trees. The road was calling, the leaves were falling. September was near, and school was waking from its brief slumber. Soon it would have a hunger that would only be satisfied by eating every last minute of my time. Soon would return the late nights, the pressure, the petty drama and cold cement walls. Soon I would be alone in a crowd once again, the words contra and morris and rappersword as foreign of words to my classmates as 老师 and 美国人. Yes, I would see my friends. Yes, I would learn. Yet there would be an integral part of myself most of my peers could not imagine.

I thought of the past week. (Campers’ Week at) Pinewoods had quickly welcomed me back, despite my absence the past two years. The new dining hall, with its pale young wood, was the only place that had changed dramatically. All else matched my memories with eerie accuracy: the forest green door to the Camphouse, the birch tree that bent to dip its diamond-shaped leaves into the warm, murky waters of Round Pond, the daddy longlegs that persisted in haunting the corners and crannies of Pineneedles Cabin... I so often felt as though I were walking through my dreams and sketches, everything around me a photograph, frozen in time. I had changed and would continue to grow, but the essence of Pinewoods was eternal.

Standing in that circle, I remembered walking through camp the prior day with my new friend, Isabel. Everything had triggered a memory: the fallen green pinecones had been money when I was little and played at Pineville, the indent in a mossy slope had once held a nest of baby birds, I had once made faerie houses by those trees. I remembered stopping to look at a seemingly unremarkable pine tree, which I had suddenly realized had grown, the branches higher up now. Pinewoods, it seemed, was the one place that did not shrink as I grew. After all, a forest should not shrink.

The thought of leaving all that once again, allowing that world to morph back into mental images and longing sketches, details fading and shifting, made the air I breathed become heavier with each passing breath. Each person stood silent still, the last notes still ringing in our ears. I glanced over at Isabel. Her eyes shone as she gave me a tremulous smile. We laughed, and then broke into sobs as her mother gathered us into an embrace. I heard the circle around me break, echoing my laughter and tears. It was bittersweet, like the end of a song. Like the sweet notes fading into a sweeter silence and a bitter emptiness. It was time to leave.

Farewell, I must be gone...

Emma Breslow has been going to Pinewoods since she was a toddler and was giving tours of the marble machines by the time she was ten. A senior in high school, she dances with Red Herring Morris and writes poetry and fiction in her spare time.

WEB EXTRA—John Krumm’s tune notation will be on our website when this article is posted online. To hear a slight variation of the round, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CAV4wVr97Lg>.