

The Trees in My Wood Lot

Today an old man came by,
younger, I think, than I,
saying he would like to buy
some trees, the biggest and best
of those living in my forest.

That is your woods, is it not,
he asked, as he tipped his head
sideways. And I also nodded, saying,
yes, but if you please
I have no wish to sell my trees.
I like all of my trees, just the way they are.

He said he only wanted a few of the
best and biggest because they were the
most valuable, and always the old trees
in a wood lot need removing, he said,
so the younger ones can grow.

And I said no, my trees are astonishing
to me and grand, more valuable to me
even should they die and fall, than if
sawed into boards or turned into
clever paintings on a wall,

But he continued, repeating once more,
The same words, a woods needs pruning;
old trees must be removed. And I replied,
but only, sir, if you treat it as a cash crop.

My woods, I said, is a crop solely of delight
filled with trails visited and tramped
by local folks, trails for horses ridden by
people, sometimes startled and admired by
parents, grandparents, children, grandchildren,
friends, in daylight or dark, better than
anyone else's park: red, black, and white oaks,
shagbark and pignut hickories, soft and
hard maples, white ash and black walnut,
the cluster of precious basswoods in the
corner by the cow pasture gate, the
biggest ones harboring in their knotted,
hollow trunks, red, gray, and brown squirrels,
possums, raccoon families, chipmunks, voles

white-footed mice, red and gray foxes,
sly coyotes, wild turkeys and vultures
a red-tailed hawk and a great-horned owl,
corroborees of crows, that beautifully
singing wood thrush, and white-tail does,
bucks, and fawns. And the redbud and
dogwood blossoms, spring beauties,
jacks-in-the pulpit, may apples, all those
wildflowers that live on the forest floor,
blossoming wildly in all directions.

I said I like to stop inside my woods,
stand quietly and lean back and stare
up into the crowns of those tallest,
most dignified of all of my trees, marveling
at their unique and stupendous beauty.

What, I said, if trees had never happened?
Wouldn't we then be distraught and lonely,
feeling cheated? How could we live such
noble lives as these we're living now, without trees,
without those lovely, ancient, majestic trees?
I told him sometimes I like to use the woods
of trees to carve and shape and design, and
marvel at the smooth and figured beauty of the grain.

The man, now somehow seeming even older, sighed,
and said, I see these many walking sticks
you've made here, on your porch. How much
are they worth? And I replied that I had never
sold one, although I had given some away to
special friends. He asked how many were there,
and I said exactly one hundred on the porch,
but I am not prepared to sell them yet.

I didn't tell him about those inside the house,
the outrageous grooved wild black cherry knee,
the toothy rattlesnake, and the dragon and Pterosaur;
or that I was planning to sculpt all of those on the porch.

And then he said, "Well, I do not anyway yet need
a walking stick . And I replied that one doesn't have
to need a walking stick to carry one, to relish one,
to appreciate, enjoy, and eventually treasure one
when walking in the woods. I drew out my oldest
and favorite one and told how I had lost it for

more than a year. Then one day in late summer, following the severity of winter and the explosiveness of spring, there it was again, still leaning comfortably against a willing ironwood tree where I had left it, unknowingly alone and untended, its top surface now checked with gentle rows of tiny splits that make it seem to me all the more valuable, all the more mine.

At this the old man sighed, shook my hand again, passed me a business card from inside his pocket, and went away silently.