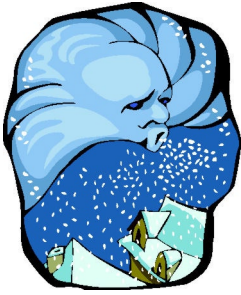


January at Marguerite's Cabin

Past posts from Marguerite Gahagan's *Pine Whispers* column in *The North Woods Call*

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There comes a time when the world looks ageless, snow untracked, sparkling, echoing the stars, cold locking the woods in a tight secret world of winter, the time when the January moon is full.

It is a time of silence broken when a tree, an old tree in the woods splits wide, when the cabin mutters, when

a log cracks with a sleep-awakening noise, and the bedroom is bathed in white moonlight. The woods seems stark, naked when seen after midnight, the night of the full moon, trees black, etched against the white snow, all bathed in the moon's light, balsams rising high, tips like church steeples when churches once had steeples, but ever do the balsams rise high in the light of the round orb of January splendor. The spires rise black against the woods, old balsams singing praise as stars twinkle with a sparkling brilliance in the cold of January, riding near the full moon.

It sails, rising higher, over a lake and ice stretches in its whiteness, stretches and sings, a murmur that starts in the south and travels, growing ever stronger, into a wild crescendo of roaring at the north end, a song rising to merge with the melody of the singing spires of the balsams.

It is cold, too cold for the perfume of the swamp to move, cedar though quiet, cedar reflecting the white moon's light, balsam needles a black pattern on the snow beneath, fancy fern green, spread in a depression on the snow like lace in a wind-carved hollow.

The hare moves reluctantly, his snowshoes, hairy feet so large, take him from under the blowdown's protective cover into the beaten path he has made to an aspen stand where he can gnaw on bark, aspen standing tall like white ghosts, branches bare, twisted black etched on white. An owl fluffs its white feathers as it sits on a birch branch, tree trunk white, melting into the snow-white as the full moon rises.

Porcupine, high on an oak, curls around the branch in a crotch, a small dark shadow sleeping, slowed down by inner magic, sleeping as the cold creeps through the woods, riding on the rays of the full moon. A skunk, black and white against the shadowed woods floor, digs through the snow for food. A deer rises from under a pine, branches low over it, and walks slowly, eyes starry as it looks at the white moon, and finds its runway and travels slowly to a cutting to browse, moonlight filling each footstep of snow, glittering diamonds in the frigid cold of the full moon's majesty.

A fire has an added warmth when the full moon rises. The fire dances, crackles against logs as snow sputters and melts, and a pine knot bursts into red, gold, blue flames. The pine knot entices the log into flames and the flames are shadows against the pine walls of the cabin.

The fire sings, a small hissing song that grows into a symphony of percussions, little cymbals, small drums and bassoons, woodwinds singing, the high notes of a violin, all in miniature, all in the song of the fireplace where log music serenades the full moon of the cold January night.

There is something special about the fire at the time of the full moon in January. The copper of the powder horn hanging on the mantel is more golden. The old cowbell looks like silver. The scent of the pomander balls is more spicy. The copper teakettle glows like red-gold. The fire is hit by a down draft, and there is the perfume of pine.

The pine walls hold secret eyes that become alive as the moon, the white moon, rises. The white pine holds a horde of small eyes, knots, but eyes, a small creature, with one eye closed winking, another with eyes alert, eyebrows lifted in alarm, another, a sleepy fellow, eyelids half closed, and one with eyes and nose obviously pressed against the wood to see the fireplace better, to catch the play of the full moon's light and fireplace glow.

The heart of the tree stretches high on each wallboard, each limb a knot, each knot an eye, each eye a story of ages gone. The wall is history, a leaf from the past, of white and Norway sagas, of what they had seen in the old, old woods.

The floor is warm, golden warm by the fireplace, the maple from Maple Valley veined delicately, each vein, each wondrous design a diary of its history, a county history, and waxed, it mirrors the fireplace color and at the window it mirrors the full moon's saga of the world traveled, ocean and desert, cathedral and palace, straw hut and igloo, Paris and London, wilderness and Twelfth Street, free man and slave, and it rests gently on a balsam branch, touches a cedar and a hare with ears high, staring at the moon, the full moon of January bathing the world in splendor no man-made light can duplicate. In its white splendor is music and beauty. On the balsam branch it rests gentle rays, the white moon of January.

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