

Uncharted

*Karen Tallkat Conley**

At high altitude under gray skies
alone through a mountain forest,
winding up and upward again.
It is all uphill
until the squishy giggly shallow stream
and the twisty turny path.
Skinny unpaved uneven places
with rocks, old logs, and low places to avoid.

Now the wind is coming in gusts against and all around us.
My horse smells rain. I suspect a storm.
His nostrils twitch and flare.
Deeper and deeper into the forest we go, stirring flocks of fussy birds
that peep and squeak in protest as we pass.

We blow by the old long abandoned cabin
past the white-tailed deer families that live on the mountain with us.
Leaves are swirling, branches rustle.
Storm is coming, clouds are building, and we are turning
the corner leading to a vast opening
of sweet meadow grass. Tall straight pines line both sides of the wildflower
meadow, like uniformed guards, doormen, sentries or watchmen on duty.
We are moving ahead, now faster and faster until we blend and combine
into the scene itself.

The thrill of a steady forward motion until we are invisible.

Looking back over my shoulder, I see the guardian trees so deep and green
leaning toward us as if waving goodbye and farewell.

Dreamy sweet well wishes flow from them
as we fly past. My long hair, his black mane and tail
fly straight out behind us in the wind.
A salute to the guardians.

We are nearing another opening now
galloping galloping hooves pounding out a steady rhythm.
I hardly even need the reins, bridle, stirrups or saddle.
A great black beast, my handsome escort
carries me willingly, easily on his back.

Thunder rolls again and again
suggesting we focus on the opening ahead.
There is an unknown space beyond the known.

Breathless, eyes wide open,
I want to see it all.
I am riding, I am free.
I am flying, I am born
again and maybe again.

It is all coming back to me now.
I am going home...
Going home. I am going home.

I am
going... home.

* Karen Tallkat Conley passed away on August 27, 2020 from complications of COVID-19. I know she is happier now. At the end of the day, however, it was up to her as to where she wanted to be. I know we will hear from her again. Karen wrote "Uncharted" about 3-4 months prior to her passing. I think the reader will understand its meaning and foreshadowing. A beautiful voice has been lost. –Michael Conley