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### A Key to Treasure

I recall one wintry evening, all gray and golden, when I readily snatched myself from the dragging schoolwork and set off through the Virginian woods. It was nigh sunset, and the sky flaunted rare blotches of gold, hazy, lightest blue, orange flame, and a tint that hinted the approach of rosy splendor. Bracing myself against the dry, cold wind, I strode down the curving path to the bridge. It crossed the pond by which I often lingered, for it offered inspiration, peace, and calm at the day's end. I climbed the bridge steps and stood at the summit, looking west. Now the advent of rose could be seen above the horizon, and, as I gazed, the sky filled with the indescribable hues of deep magenta, blazing pinks, and that trimming of red characteristic of such a sunset. I waited and watched till the colors began dropping down, down, until they faded entirely. I then got on my merry way: descending the steps of the bridge to the opposite shore, trotting rightwards up the slope that led to my oft-trod track, and setting foot on it as it bore me away.

With a snapshot of the sunset in my mind, newly-donned gloves on my hands, and cold-flushed cheeks on my face, I walked and thought a little. As I chose my course through a maze of fallen logs, I thought of the beauty that came with every setting sun, of the God who created and perfected each, and of the path that now led me far onwards. Singing lustily as I do, I reached an open fork in the trail and paused. Surrounding me were tall, slim poplars dressed in white-dappled grey bark with their black stripes standing out against the dull background of bare trees. Wintry leaves lay in a state of decomposition on the path, all lifeless and reminding me of the barrenness of this season. Of a sudden, a query fell into my head. Gazing down upon the trail at my feet and around at the numerous outlets and further reaching tracks to my left, right, and ahead, I thought

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to myself, what is a path? And, mind you, I am not wondering at the Merriam-Webster definition of “path”. Rather, I wish to know in precise terms “what *is* a path?” —What does it do? And what is its significance? I continued to look intently about me, seeing the track of earth, moss, and weeds that I’ve forever considered a “path”. It was my regular route and would take me up a steep hill much-frequented by deer, then send me to the left. Several different trails branched off this fork if I were to make new tack from my usual direction. Yet, as I stood in that first junction, I found I could not desert the course I often took. So, I went on, and up, musing the while on that self-posed question.

I ascended the hill and succeeded in keeping my footing on the steep, muddy slope. As I topped the summit, I allowed my eyes to rove about at my fresh surroundings. My cogitations were full of the place about me, for I now ambled through a property nominated Mulberry Spring Farm. It had craggy mulberry trees, no spring whatsoever, and was a rural tourist location. I called it simply “the Farm”. It had been a functioning one long ago, yet now served to host guests on weekend retreat. It remained unendingly old and beautiful, with ancient trees, rolling, meadowy hills, hand-built rock walls, and 18<sup>th</sup>-century era buildings that looked it. They were all a shade of blue, and one, the Monroe House, was blue-grey with black shutters, a red tin roof, and a regal attitude, if structures have such. It was capable of comfortably lodging the ten members of my family. Squatting alongside it were two red-roofed cabins of deep dark blue that had each a tiny, quaint front porch, with rocking chairs, a table for mugs, and a bundle of firewood for the stove inside.

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I walked on, smiling admiringly at everything as though it was mine. I tramped past this place ‘most every day, and its gorgeous landscape was inspiring to me. It was all fresh and wild and lovely, no matter the season, and I felt free indeed when I walked there. Down the hill from the Monroe House and cabins sat the Cottage. It was elegant and tidy, yet reminded me of the hens who bustled in the coop at home: somehow motherly yet not mothers. Near to it was the “Vintage Barn”, a lofty building well-liked by newlyweds, for it was light-filled, rustic, and preserved an air of freedom about it. It recalled to me the youthful, adventurous, and defiant face of a girl just graduated from high school. She felt ready for anything and could assuredly “take on the world”.

To my favorite place of all I have not yet made my way. For around the corner from the cabins was an elderly weeping cherry that sighed over brick paths pushed up by its roots. The tree, with its crusty silver-grey bark, was tall and strong, and I felt it possessed the quiet stability that sustained the entire farm. It was the lighthouse that kept ships safe; it was the fortress which prohibited enemies; it was the mother who rocked her tearful baby to sleep. To me, it was the symbol that made a beautiful piece of Virginia both resilient and whole. Its drooping arms cast a shade of succor, of soothing, of warmth, and when the wind blew, it beckoned with slender fingers, calling its children in. And *I* was its child and friend, for though guests to the Farm might stop to admire it, they were infrequent, and I came often. While countless wandered past, I stayed on the trail that led to it. Hitherto, I must remark that, though this tree had been my companion for some time, it held something from me: it had secrets and mysteries still concealed.

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My eyes took in the land yet untraveled. I rambled on, composing a poem to the tree as I traipsed across the thick grass of the rolling hillside. And then I came to a fork, that led to yet another fork, and on to a crossroads. I startled myself and abruptly halted my steps as I realized that all my wanderings had inadvertently answered the query I'd posed at the start of my wanderings. It was as though the weeping cherry had whispered the answer to me as I gazed upon it. That is, what is a path? A path is a key unlocking a treasure trove of many more trails for he who travels along it. On each side of its route wait Good Fortune and Ill, as well as Virtue (in its numerous forms), Evil (in its deceptive disguises), and all things imaginable. Standing on that Virginian hillside, this I knew surely: each path you take where there are many branching—from every main road you set out on—each path is a key.