

Zeitschrift: Der Kreis : eine Monatsschrift = Le Cercle : revue mensuelle
Band: 27 (1959)
Heft: 3

Artikel: Within the enchanted forest
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-568243>

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Within the Enchanted Forest

by Hadrian

In a play by James Barrie entitled «The Enchanted Cottage» two homely people discover a cottage in a forest wherein they can become beautiful—at least in each other's eyes. It would be too romantic to say in so anti-romantic a period as the nineteen-fifties that such a wishfulfillment impulse draws young men to enter the enchanted forest of an evening. One cannot say with assurance that they imagine they will be more beautiful in the eyes of other strollers through these dells; in fact, the rapidity with which they usually move therein creates the impression that they fear to be seen more than fleetingly in the twilight. The fact that they often wait for their prey in the more shadowy of the walks and even in the dense darkness under the low trees makes one suspect that they do not believe the forest makes them more beautiful, that, contrariwise, they may even hope darkness will do for them what daylight can not: bring them a lover.

Where is this forest of Ardent Longing?

It may be entered from several directions, but the favoured approach is from the west, by a bridge near the winding road that leads down into Central Park from west seventy-ninth street. Often there are silent figures leaning against the iron railing of this bridge, presumably admiring the view over the lake toward the distant lighted towers of the magic city of Manhattan; they do not sit up on the railings for the simple reason that the railings are spiked.

The other approaches to the forest are not guarded by watchful figures, only this one. From the east it may be approached through Faggot's Meadow; and from the south by way of the rustic summer house which is usually either unoccupied or haunted by the ghost of Judith Anderson.

After crossing the bridge of first encounter the twilight men may either go directly up a slanting walk which leads eventually to the Belvedere Tower, or they may turn to the right and circle around to pass through the archway that supports the Bridge of Sighs. There is a lamp post here whose light illumines those passing underneath to the eyes of those perched raven-like upon the crenelated top of the bridge—but these ravens are never known to make immediate darting flights down to fasten their beaks upon any choice pieces passing below. They may look down in longing, but they do not take overt action.

On the far side of this archway there is again a division into three pathways; the central one is the one to take first, for it leads directly up to the very heart of the forest. Here one passes along a sharp embankment of rock, and sometimes loitering figures are stationed along this rock with one foot raised against the stone.

This pathway brings one out upon a walk which forms one side of a triangle of woods. There are benches on each side of this focal triangle. This is the centre of the forest, and the ground is gradually sinking from the erosion caused by the herd of antelopes which prance along it every night in search of fodder.

Bird watchers say that just as many birds can be seen by sitting quietly in one place and letting the birds come one's way as can be seen by darting feverishly through the underbrush in pursuit of them. In general, however, the forest boys prefer a policy of constant motion to one of patient waiting. One can

observe them attempt the latter, but regardless of the age, face or size of the boy, he usually continues to sit there unmolested even by an inquiry for a match. One suspects that most of the passing boys lack the audacity to sit directly down on the same bench and try to open a conversation. The best they may hope is that by a backward glance over the shoulder they might lure the bird on the bench to fly after them into the foliage, where an appointment could be arranged. Therefore, instead of stopping, they would rather keep restlessly on the move.

If, out of curiosity alone, one sits for ten or fifteen minutes on one of these benches, one will be struck by the quickness of the glide with which most figures move in the enchanted forest. The later in the evening, the faster they walk. They sometimes pass so rapidly one can barely get a cursory look at their faces, and are gone again. Wherever there is lamplight, they tend to avoid it, as if fearing such an encounter would prove «*Ill Met By Lamplight*». Evidently they prefer to catch a shadowy glimpse or be seen only fragmentarily themselves, to appraise a face rather by the momentary glow of a match than in the relatively bright illumination from a lamp.

The face in the night is more important to some people than to others. One can perchance find oneself drawn into a conversation by a person who is attracted enough to tarry there; but when he bends forward to take a light from your match and can actually see your features, there may appear instantly in his dilated pupils an alarmed look which says, «You are not for me».

On rare occasions one might meet a happy pair of lovers strolling through the copses, humming or singing together; but for the most part the night gazelles move in furtive silence and talk in whispers. They have a guilty, frightened air, as if they expected to be set upon by footpads did they not keep in ceaseless motion. Nothing disconcerts and confuses them more than a carefree, open, happy attitude. Someone, for example, who would have the effrontery to walk through the forest singing in a free, open voice, or would sit upon a bench, pouring forth music into the night—seems eccentric to them. Instead of being attracted, they are frightened and think he must be «way out». The lack of furtiveness, the lack of guilt, shown by such an attitude is perplexing to them. They are not happy, Lord knows, so how can anyone else display happiness and peace of mind?

There is a curious tendency among them to cluster briefly and separate quickly. One will pass along a particular stretch of walk and find four or five individuals lurking at intervals along the edge of the walk; but if one returns down this very same strip of walk perhaps ten minutes later, it will be deserted. The chances are that none of them have made out. The disappearance of all does not, alas, have a glad explanation, but a sad one. Here, as elsewhere, boys are unpredictably, inexplicably finicky. One who seems to ignore every tender morsel which passes him, is doing so because he has no use for youth and is waiting for someone over thirty-five; whereas another will accept nothing but a little queen of precisely his own size and flimsiness. Many, many evenings are lost in this forest because so few of these nocturnal inhabitants are ever attentive to the oldest of hunting maxims: a bird in hand is worth two in the bush. This veteran daw would say rather that if one wishes success, one had better cling to the bird who comes and alights upon one's shoulder, even if he is not a Nonpareil; rather than to jump up and shake him off at sight of a

Baltimore Oriole flying by. One will not catch the oriole, and one will have lost the gentle ovenbird who wanted to nestle one warm under his wings.

Indeed, as a result of the extreme nervousness of movement in this forest, one hesitates to guess what percentage of successful mating encounters here. On a buggy evening one could assume this speed is prompted by a desire not to have tender arms and ankles nipped by nasty mosquitoes, but the same tempo maintains on bugless nights as well. Did the forest not prove helpful to some, it would not be so persistently populated, and yet, all the same, one often emerges later onto the parkside and comes upon the identical faces lining the benches and the wall, or cruising past them.

The costumes worn in the forest are apt to be rather primitive. One can occasionally see a *rara avis* there in a complete suit (usually some belle who will not speak to one while in the nude at the «Y» pool) or perhaps a college type with a sweater tossed jauntily over his shoulder, but in the main the Ivy League wardrobe is not much seen here. A T shirt, or a plain shirt, and a simple pair of slacks or jeans represent the approved costume. The colors are almost never spectacular, but nearly always muted, as if the figures felt compelled to try and lose themselves in the setting by assuming the protective camouflage of earth colours.

Negroes do sometimes flaunt red and orange, especially when it is quite dark, but many of them attire themselves so sombrelly it is impossible to discern anything about them except the fact that they are Negroes.

Figures with dogs can be seen in the enchanted forest, but as a rule they only approach each other. If their two dogs intermingle, it is possible for a conversation to begin on the logical basis of an inquiry about the sex of the other boy's dog. But, except with other dog-walker's, a dog is not usually helpful as a conversational gambit. It would seem as if the dog makes the boys uncertain as to the true purpose of his master's presence in the woods.

It should be noted, in coming to a conclusion, that this forest is not known by so romantic a name to the police. They call it The Ramble, and at least one newspaper has referred to it as a «notorious rendezvous for homosexuals».

Ah! but now, by using so brutal a word, we have shattered the mood which pervades the Enchanted Forest. This mood is not a gay mood, not a giddy mood, not a congenial mood; but neither is it a blunt and basic mood. It is rather the mood of some dimly lit ballet by Antony Tudor, where figures graze in the night and elude each other constantly. Here even the most masculine of damsels are blown about like fragile autumn leaves, dancing a rigadon of quiet despair.

«Well... so long»

by Hartsell Young

The music, liquid with saxes and clarinets, flowed out to them from the juke box inside the drive-in. Joe started to sing the lyrics as the second chorus began, his light baritone edged with a warm vibrato at the ends of phrases. At the release Ralph came in with him, his voice just a bit heavier and very straight. The girls hummed along with them. No one finished at quite the same time, and they all laughed at the ragged ending.