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236 words

Walk of life  
by Cheryl Markosky

*Freedwoman*

Walk to pines and panic in the Lower Silesian forest. Cross your heart and the Kwisa river – your pudgy arms wrap round your father’s tree-trunk neck. *Cicho, dziecko. Hush, child.*

Pull through on pine seeds that catch on a breeze and spread far from the parent tree. Full of Vitamin B and surprisingly tasty when compared with the alternative. Nothing.

Must learn to walk before you run, he tells you.

Forge a passport, forge a ticket – forage a New World life.

*Washerwoman*

Walk up the aisle to pines and possibility in The Rockies.

Across the ocean and the Crowsnest Pass – your slender arms wrapped round your husband’s branchline.

Boil young male pine cones each spring. Add top of the cow's milk and he won't mind the crunch on teeth, the crunch decision, the crunch in his heart.

Worship the ground he walks on, he insists.

Scrub, and scrape, and scratch – coal, dirt, a living.

*Madwoman*

Sleepwalk to pines and parenthood in wood-decay fungi.

Into the woods to bury one, two, three in coffin dark – your aching arms round the cleaved babies.

Peel raw bark from young twigs, unswaddling new growth, new wood, new tree ring. Excellent source of Vitamin C when trying to survive.

Crawl before you walk, you urge your new child, face like a drying beet, born from pine needle tea.

Walk home – to the pines, the forests, the mountains. This is home.

The End

