



***In response to Patricia Aaron***

*Four Seasons in Iceland #3*

***Mr. Stith's Woods***

When spring finally came after the chill of a Minnesota winter, I used to get up early before the morning chaos that was my family of too many children, an angry and usually pregnant mother, and an alcoholic hung over father.

I escaped to Mr. Stith's woods where violets were pushing through the melting snow and the brown dead leaves of butternut and boxelder trees. The air was fresh and cold and blew through me, a cleansing scent. The odors of bleach and shit from the diaper pail and the drifting clouds of cigarette smoke were left in the little house behind me.

Best of all was the silence or rather the sounds of the natural world before the humans woke up. Bird calls, wind rustling new green leaves, my feet shuffling through the fallen leaves covering the wet ground of snow. I could hear and see my own breath.

As the sun rose and bathed the treetops with light, I reluctantly turned to trudge home. A squirrel dashing up a boxelder and perched on a branch to scold me. "Oh, shut up," I said. But it wasn't the squirrel's fault. I knew I would be scolded by my mother for something or another, yelling, slapping, and crying was the language awaiting me.

Mr. Stith's woods saved me every spring with a promise of hope, better days. Because of these few acres of the wild behind my house, I managed to survive my childhood.

**Patricia A. Murphy**  
Roaming Writers



*Patricia Aaron, Four Seasons in Iceland #3, encaustic, watercolor, on Rives BFK 1/1 monotype, 26 x 19 inches*