Kettles and Moraines

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Kettles and Moraines

Alan Bergeson

It is dawn
and the snow is falling,
giant flakes sliding to and fro
like sheets of paper
blown from a messy desk by
a naughty March breeze
sneaking through an open window.
I stand in the kettle peering through the frosty silence
looking for the parallel tracks that lead through the woods
and up the steep moraine.
Slowly I glide forward,
first the right foot
then the left.
My skis break through the newly fallen snow
to the layer below and crunch the crusty cushion of ice
pummeled into submission by the many skiers who have traversed
the trail before me.
We all come to conquer the moraine.
I begin the ascent,
first sliding gracefully
then slapping my skis upon the snow
with short staccato steps
sometimes sliding backwards.
The trail seems vertical and now I am forced to herringbone
stamping awkwardly like some drunken, flat-footed
penguin on an Antarctic ice flow.
I ski a wall and seem to be at a stand-still.
My legs ache,
my heart pounds,
I gasp for breath.
The summit is within my reach—almost.
Suddenly, my feet are ripped out from underneath
me and I claw to the top on hands and knees and skis.

Victory.
A pyrrhic victory
for now I peer down the other side of the moraine
at a trail rutted, bumpy, treacherous.
Through the newly fallen snow
the disasters of a thousand skiers are laid out
plainly like events at Dunkirk or Waterloo.
I take the first tentative step forward,
peering cautiously through the snow,
and suddenly, my whole body seems to be in flight
like some novice paratrooper
kicked unceremoniously from a transport
by an impatient sergeant.
I hurtle downhill like a sonic boom.
Stay low,
knees bent,
poles back,
concentrate, concentrate, concentrate.
My skis bump and jar beneath my feet,
clattering and chattering,
speaking to me of impending doom.
My mind wanders for a fleeting second,
and instantly I am in a helpless, hapless heap
at the foot of the trail.
A naked birch, the silent sentinel of the ski trail,
stands beside me,
smirking.
Silence once again surrounds me and
the snow flakes begin to cover me
like the desert sands upon a weary Bedouin and his camel
in a swirling storm.
I stand.
My confidence is shaken but down
the trail other moraines await me.
I must meet them and know them
for this is
the only way out of the woods.
Slowly I glide forward,
first the left foot,
and then the right.