

Michael McDowell

## Night Walks

After watching sunset from the top of Half Dome  
we descended to our Yosemite campsite in darkness.  
I learned then how much better to leave headlamp off  
and intuit tree branch, trail rock, bend in the path.

Years later, living in a borrowed cabin in the woods,  
I followed bleached branches marking the path to my door.  
Even on moonless, starless nights they glowed faintly  
to guide me home.

Tonight I walk my Ashcreek neighborhood after traffic has settled  
and the freeway hums softly like a refrigerator in a quiet house.  
Bright colors have fled, and small sounds magnify:  
a rustle of alder leaves, gurgle of creek, click of bats.

A scent of unseen gardenias rolls down the hillside  
and a mild wind from the southwest brushes my arm  
telling me to look up, where scattered clouds  
are turning the night sky into gray-blue marble.