**Paw Prints in the Snow**

A Poem

By T.D. Smith

One wintry afternoon I went for a walk with my dog in the snow.

I stomped along, trudging through the crisp, newly fallen white frozen drifts

In my snow boots,

Moving forward, my dog pulling me,

Pushing the accumulated white stuff away,

Forming a trench for me to traverse,

Stomping it down with the heel of my boot.

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

Go my feet

As I slide and step and stride.

We go down to the little path by the river near my house.

I stand and observe, taking it all in.

Everything is so still and quiet and serene in the snow.

There go two pairs of ducks,

A male

A female.

Two couples.

I remark to myself how across the river is usually an industrial park

Full of sulky smells and sullen, iron sights of modern machination

Now beautiful,

White and pure,

Cleansed by the precipitation this morning and night before.

The trees capped with a layer of white

Hanging regally on their limbs.

It is as if the trees are adorned in fine furs.

It is so beautiful, this enchanted winter wonderland,

Which only the night before looked bland and bleak,

cold,

modern,

Industrial,

Now transformed into

A scene of beauty.

My dog and I venture onward.

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

All at once the gray clouds part, and a light shines down.

I stop, frozen.

Scenes from my life I see

Flashing before me.

I am bewildered.

But eventually my senses return

And I see

The previous decade.

So many times my dog and I have travelled this path over that decennial period.

I see us come and go.

Myself happy and sad,

Defeated,

Neutral,

and,

Eventually,

Replenished.

Always my dog

Happy,

Hunting,

Pulling me forward.

For each scene, I see a set of footprints in the snow

Behind the figures.

The flooded, flurried flight of my life passes,

Then the figures recede

As the final, more recent scenes close,

And converge back onto my scene and into me, now.

All that remain are the long regression

Of footprints in the snow.

I look back at them.

I notice that at multiple points,

There is only one set of footprints.

I cry out.

I feel so alone.

Why was I to be alone?

Why was I to experience

Torment,

Lamentation,

Emptiness,

At those times?

Why was there no one to walk with me?

But soft,

A bright white light from the heavens now glows,

Pure,

Brighter than even before

And suddenly,

Another figure appears,

Robed in white,

Snowflakes fluttering, resting on his beard.

He is ancient.

He is young.

He is beautiful.

In His face

Are both Mercy and Love infinite,

And

Simultaneously

Authority and Discernment.

“Why,” I ask Him, “Why all the pain?

Why was I left alone?

To face and walk amongst all the torment

In this present valley of tears?”

He smiles.

“Child,” says He, “Look closer.”

Turning back, I look again down on the path,

examining the footprints in the snow.

I gasp.

For where I once thought there were

But one set of footprints,

My own,

Left lonely and cold,

I see I was mistaken.

For they are not my footprints,

Nor are they footprints at all,

But rather,

*Paw prints.*

I realize.

I was never alone.

The dog sent to me

To be my friend

To love me unconditionally,

She was always there.

And seeing spiritually now,

Those times

Where there were only paw prints in the snow,

It was then that she carried me.

I turn back around,

But the man is gone

To my eyes.

The clouds return,

And the sky is cloudy and somber once more.

Where the man was before,

Now stands a woman.

She looks at me,

Smiling,

Loving,

Her eyes glitter,

Veritable pearls

So fitting in this snowy scene.

I walk to her.

I take her hand.

We turn,

And the three of us walk together

Through the snow,

Making new footprints

And paw prints,

All the way home.

Onward we walk.

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

Scallomp!

In the direction we know will lead us

To warm hearth,

Good food,

And restful sleep.

Two hearts throb, full.

And a single happy tail wags.