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The quest

by Rachel Hadas

Scrambling down gullies, fording icy streams,
staggering over snow-crust that keeps breaking

so I keep sinking in up to my thighs,
then pulling out a sodden leg again,

first one leg, then the other, barely moving
forward, pursued, pursuing, which is which,

I stumble to a hut at the edge of the forest
where a band of merciful young outlaws

shelter me, give me dry boots, a blanket,
feed me, let me rest awhile by their fire.

I mustn't sleep. I must be on my way.
The darkness is unyielding, and the cold.

Tangle of black branches. Lantern light on snow.
A friendly little square of fire-lit window

behind me, but again I am pursued,
pursuing: quest, flight, exile. Dawn. Pale sky.

Black boulders line the road. Between steep banks
a brackish stream is trickling downhill.

Rachel Hadas's new book of poems, *Love and Dread* (Measure), will be published this spring.

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