

Before the Men's Retreat

– Greg Kimura

She asks: "What is it?"
And I say: "100 men naked in the woods."
She wrinkles her nose and says: "No clothes?"
And I say: "Sometimes."
And she says: "What do you do?"
I say: "First we remove the coat of corporate soldier,
of worker bee, of boss, of coach, of business owner.
Then we pull off the jacket of marriage.
Toss aside the shoes of parenthood.
The umbrella of son.
The backpack of friend.
The helmet of hero, savior, tough guy.
We pull from our pockets the mantle of lady's man, lover,
slayer of the weaker sex.
We check in our charm and toss away the pants
of romance.
All the roles and expectations we carry about in our lives,
we leave behind like a pile of clothes on the floor."
She says: "On the floor? That's what I thought.
Then you're naked?"
Says I: "Not yet.
We promise not to engage in physical violence,
then we strip off unnecessary civilization.
Toss it in the pile with all the rest."
She: "Then you're naked."
I: "No. We still hold onto our tattered dysfunctions
and threadbare beliefs
like a 10 year old pair of bikini briefs.
That's the last thing,
but we hold fast, because, you know,

those stinking little lies and truths,
that stained and shredded pair of underwear
held our life together for 10, 20, 40 years.
And only when we can toss that old thing away
are we truly naked"
She blinks and says: "So it's 100 men in the woods
in tattered underwear."
I say: "Yes. But over the course of the week,
it washes away in the realm of ritual.
Blown away by the breath of spirit.
Cracked open under the scrutiny and support of men.
Pried off by the power of story."
She stares at me, silent, and then: "Why? ...
Why do you do it?"
I say: "So we can see what's left.
That's us. Naked.
We can hardly recognize ourselves,
but that's who we are.
It's blinding. Dazzling. Beautiful.
Painful, but very real.
We walk with it.
Work with it.
Sing songs to honor and protect it.
Wounds are revealed, healed,
become our strength and our shield.
Internal lands are explored,
monsters are banished and gored.
And in the end we bring some of this back into our lives,
even as we put our clothes back on."
She shifts and settles,
ponders, and pads about the room,
then smiles and says:
"Well, have a good time then."

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