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An ineffable beauty shrouds Goethe's poem *The Meeting, The Departure*. The poem opens airily in the darkness of night, hushed and plush, all *pulses rushed* and *vapor hooded*. But then a cathedral form looms above the poet, a giant oak tree. The scene reminds the art-savvy reader of mysterious paintings of the natural world by Caspar David Friedrich, the contemporaneous Romantic artist. The intricate branches of his trees turn painted skies into stained glass; the painter and poet share awe in such imagery. As if in a wide-eyed children's fable, the tree seems haunted, eyes glowering in the leaves and the *observant dark*. Even in the peace of nature and the decline of day, life animates the poet, his blood afire. The moon is no longer simply a planetary body, silvery, passive, and distant. Now it grieves through the lurking clouds and the sonorous wail and shudder of wind, playing on the poet's captive ears. In nature poems, the moon often takes a feminine form, and this imagery shines from the second stanza into the following stanza, where femininity takes on a cursory but still more palpable form.

The third stanza moves from nature personified to an actual persona, emanating from the natural world and addressed in second-person form. This woman evokes Laura, the muse of the trecento Italian poet Petrarch. Laura is an embodiment of pure nature, laurel leaves and yellow flowers, and she inspires most of his poems. Goethe follows Petrarch's muse-worn path. Her presence seems like a talisman for him—his heart and breath propelled by her love. Redolent with spring flowers, the compassionate blush of her face disarms him; only a moment ago, he seemed lost in the penumbra of an imposing wood.

Yet tension overtakes the closing stanza. Her lovely presence, incubated in night, vanishes with the dawn. And though her kisses embody love, her eyes hint at the weariness of the world. Goethe pairs images of beauty and despair with a lyricism at once gentle and

subversive. He inverts the medieval notion of light conveying beauty, and instead shows how love can grow even in the alien hush of night.