

**Earth Care and Spirituality**  
**Reflection for November 2020**

*Faith in Things Unseen* by Doug Dunlap

On trail high in the Bigelow Range,  
In last remaining days before November,  
The hour that of late afternoon...

The fall sunlight - that slanting in, rich, light;  
The light that turns to fire the very last scarlets of the red maple,  
Glistens the papery bark of the white birch,  
Beams a velvet glow on green balsam fir;  
This particular light that comes on  
At changes of seasons - and of lives -  
Markedly, in a quite noticeable moment -  
Softens,  
    Lowers,  
Signals:  
The time has arrived,  
On this day of days,  
For this light  
Slowly, now  
To slip away.

I scramble to nearby open ledge,  
Scan a graying sky.  
The low sun hovers beyond the darkening irregular ridges of Mt. Abraham;  
Farther out Tumbledown-Jackson heights, and  
Beyond and beyond farther yet ridges and ranges growing now indistinct.  
Glove-like shadows reach into the valleys of the Carrabassett River,  
Huston Brook, Stratton Brook.  
Night, even at this hour, is coming on.

But of course, I know of this,  
This well expected, you-can-count-on-it change  
(We all do);  
The arrival of that point in the year,  
Here in the North Country,  
When the hours of the night  
Exceed those of the day.  
We know this is coming.

It is one matter, though, to know ahead of Time, of such  
Or any other transformation, for any kind of season;  
Quite another to be present

At the very moment when that transformation,  
In its singular way, manifests itself,  
The immanent now imminent.  
(Or is it the other way around?)

I shall make camp at the end of this day in the dark;  
In morning rise in the same.  
Things once seen, soon, in this season,  
To become unseen.

Time to hasten - or is it?

I linger on the ledge.  
A Great Silence abides.  
In the valleys below display smatterings of gold - birch, I imagine, perhaps  
aspen/popple, maybe even a stand of turned larch,  
Contrast to their gray-green surroundings.  
High peaks - Sugarloaf, Avery, West, the Crockers - rise toward a lowering ceiling of  
cloud cover.  
Rain likely to arrive in the quiet of the night,  
To work a way into the groundwater,  
From there, to sweeten in time to come  
The life of trillium, trout lily, and hobble-bush;  
To quench thirst of red squirrel and red fox,  
Black bear and black bird;  
To embrace the lives of frog and trout.

Stepping away from the balcony ledge,  
I am not long back in the woods and on trail,  
When I take notice of undulating carpets of sphagnum moss,  
Fruit of damp and darkness.  
I had paid little notice to such during the brighter hours.

A chipmunk scampers across the path in front of me; stops;  
Looks up at me, its mouth stuffed, comically, with leaf litter -  
The makings for a warm winter bed - well-hidden.  
We regard one another there, on trail, for a time,  
Neither one of us moves.  
It gives me pause, to imagine  
A tiny cradle of chipmunk life, life longing for itself,  
Warm against the severity and the darkness, of winter.

Slate-colored juncos flit from trailside firs, fly ahead, disperse, settle out of sight.  
As the light drops ever more, they will seek out their tiny ground level nests,  
Hidden under the lowest branches of the fir,  
Or under fortuitous cover where mountain meadow grasses edge a fallen log.  
When the snows come, the juncos shall there have an out-of-sight chamber of  
warmth,  
A winter home, where, come days of longer light,  
They will lay and tend a cluster of tiny blue eggs.

I make my way along the darkening trail,  
Arrive at the clearing that is my intended spot for the night;  
Make camp, cook supper by the light of a headlamp.

The evening meal ready - and hot -  
I switch off the light,  
Eat and drink in the dark and stillness.

My senses speak to me of hot stew;  
The on-coming chill of a mountain night;  
The darkness - oh the sweet darkness!

Nearby firs, now a certain darker shade of blackness,  
Beautiful against the night's own encircling hue of black beauty,  
Marshall in their roots sap for the distant spring.

Cradle rock of mountain heights store up water for release in that months-off time  
to come.

Curled up chipmunks and nested juncos tuck in for the night.

As slip into the warmth of my own camp bed,  
I ponder this new season coming on  
Of things great and small;  
Speak a prayer of gratitude  
For faith in things unseen.

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