

OCTOBER BEFORE SLEEP

Evening slips into my tent, my sleeping bag,
surprises me with the season's first shiver.
My skylight flap is open to the first stars
sifting sparks through smoky blue.

My presence ~~only~~ blends with feral forest shapes.
Maple flares fade above banked coals of sumac.
Native noises rise with the twilight, mingle
with leftover what-ifs from childhood.

Eyes closed, I sort sounds: Small claws scrabbling
in leaf mold, legs strumming, throats ballooning,
an old rehearsed medley. Wind bumps shedding branches,
laps the backwater banking gold and copper change.

Often I've camped in these woods. After decades,
only I am different. Now a loon on the lake crazes
the night, three notes spilled in space, blue ice peaks
plying my spine like a graph. All day I followed

the Black Hand, an Indian-marked sandstone ridge
bulking above the conifers, its painted symbols
pointing to outcrops of flint
I could never find as a Scout bucking for a badge.

7muv) Lore of sharp-edged tools and fire abide
in the chips I rattle in my palm. My thumb
explores the facets; irresistibly I make sparks
in the gloom, feel hot blips on my fingers.

With the simplicity of rock the old dark diminishes
with my late day success. I close my canvas chrysalis,
roll over in the the mild warmth of ~~acceptance~~, *satisfaction*
knowing winter is still a while away.