

October Before Sleep

Night slips early into my tent
and sleeping bag. First star sparks are cold
by the time they fall through my skylight flap.
Outside, my squared canvas presence goes gray
among shades and shapes of wild dissymmetry.
Native noises begin dividing the not-quite dark,
making me stumble as I say my mechanical prayer.

Eyes closed, I sort the autumn sounds--strumming
legs, ballooning throats, small claws scrabbling
in leaf mold-- all underscored by random breezes
bumping into branches and idle water.
The labeling makes tentative peace
with faint what-ifs left over from childhood.

For miles today I followed the Black Hand,
an Indian-marked sandstone ridge bulking between
pinestands. The painted symbols point to outcrops
of flint I could never find as a scout bucking
for a badge. My thumb explores facets of the chips
rattling in my palm. Irresistibly I make sparks
in the gloom, feeling hot blips on my fingers.

It's been decades since I was here. But only I
am different. A loon on the lake crazes the quiet,
his cry a blue ice peak on my spinal graph. Perhaps
here is the place and the time my prayer rises
on its own honesty, the first star of praise
and pale understanding. I smile and roll over
slowly in the warmth of acceptance.
It's still a while before winter.

--Glenn Holloway