

Prairie Morning

I walked out into the prairie this morning. I walked out with the dog and the sun. The moon was still hanging half way up in the west and the sky was bluer than blue. There are times when the land is so beautiful that it is intimidating to attempt describing it. The experience is in standing on it, being of it, not in reading about it but write we do anyway. I guess I need to know that you know how lucky we all are.

We are in the time of brown and it is luscious. The dried weeds and seeds of weeds are standing singly and in bunches, in patches and waves of reeds that go forever. The whole world is resting in brown. The whole world has stored what it needs for the winter. The whole world is starting to nod like an old timer in his easy chair, a book open on his lap. Nod in the complete ease that octogenarians and babies share, the ease that comes after going at it, this business of living, hard and with vigor. The whole brown world is tired. The whole brown world is dozing off.

The Juncos are back in their packs of burbling cheer. The acres of brown seeds have stopped them again like they do every year in November. Stopped them here at the top of the Midwest, here where it seems warm to a bird from Hudson Bay. I smile when I think that our part of the world is South to some creatures. This is their warm weather resort. This is a Junco's Miami.

The dog bolted off two or three times in the space of twenty minutes. Something in the air filled his nose and off he went bounding like the deer he was imagining over the tops of all that waving prairie. I imagine that he is as happy as a dog can be right now. The prairie grass has dried down to where he can see over most of it unlike in summertime when it reaches far above his head. In summer he navigates by scent and the feel of the turf underfoot. In November he can see it all spreading out in front of him. In November he is as tall as a horse. In November he is the boss of all of it.

Now that I can see the shapes of the trees in their wooden structure I am becoming impatient to get busy with saws and shears. Busy with my own delusion that I can improve the aspect of a tree. "By whose standards?" asks the tree. I have no answer except to promise a more vigorous spring. I tell them that I am giving them more light and air, that it's all for their own good. And, for the short time that I am in their world, they tolerate me.

It's true that trees change completely to the eye when their leaves fall. They are made of wood and light rather than leaves and air. Trees are solid in the fall and liquid in the summer. In their present solid state they reveal themselves to be the astoundingly strong creatures that they are. At this time of year they make it clear why humans, over the millennia, have made anything and everything imaginable from their stock. For strength and flexibility, beauty and feel there is a wood for every purpose. Harvested wisely it lasts forever. When worked with care and a plan there is no substance like it. We humans have sailed on it, eaten from it, hunted with it and warmed ourselves. We have lived in them and near them from the beginning. We are the best of friends.

I wish I were not so earthbound as I would like to spend time in the tops of trees. I would like very much to go way up in the great Norway Spruce, tie myself on, and watch the prairie for a day, lunch included. But for as long as I can remember heights and I have not been speaking to each other. Too bad. Maybe in my next go around I'll know what it's like to see the view from the top. I think I will try them all from Ash to Willow. That would be quite a goal wouldn't it? Spending at least one day high up in each of the myriad species of trees.

Funny where a walk in the prairie takes your mind, lovely how the change of season causes new thoughts and new twists on old thoughts. I think I'll do it again tomorrow. You can never have too much pitching or too many daydreams.