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James Dickey

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The Eagle's Mile

- for William Douglas -

The Emmet's Inch & Eagle's Mile
Blake

By JAMES DICKEY*

Unwarned, catch into this

With everything you have:

 the trout streaming with all its quick
In the strong curve all things on all sides
 In motion the soul strenuous

And still

 in time-flow as in water blowing
Fresh and for a long time

Downhill something like air it is
 Also and it is dawn

There in merciless look-down
As though an eagle or Adam

In lightning, or both, were watching uncontrollably
For meat, among the leaves. Douglas, with you
The soul tries it one-eyed, half your sight left hanging in a river
In England, long before you died,

And now that one, that and the new one
Struck from death's instant —
Lightning's: like mankind on impulse blind-
siding God — true-up together and ride
On silence, enraptured surveillance,

The eagle's mile. Catch into this, and broaden

Into and over

The mountain rivers, over the leaf-tunnel path:

Appalachia, where the trail lies always hidden
 Like prey, through the trembling south-north of the forest
 Continent, from Springer Mountain to Maine,
 And you may walk
 Using not surpassing
 The trout's hoisted stand-off with the channel,
 Or power-hang the same in the shattered nerves
 Of lightning: like Adam find yourself splintering out
 Somewhere on the eagle's mile, on peerless, barbaric distance
 Clarivoyant with hunger,
 Or can begin can be begin to be
 What out-gentles, and may evade:
 This second of the second year
 Of death, it would be best for the living
 If it were your impulse to step out of grass-bed sleep
 As valuably as cautiously
 As a spike-buck, head humming with the first male split
 Of the brain-bone, as it tunes to the forked twigs
 Of the long trail
 Where Douglas you once walked in a white shirt as a man
 In the early fall, fire-breathing with oak-leaves,
 Your patched tunnel-gaze exactly right
 For the buried track,
 the England-curved water strong
 Far-off with your other sight, both fresh-waters marbling together
 Supporting not surpassing
 What flows what balances
 In it. Douglas, power-hang in it all now, for all
 The whole thing is worth: catch without warning
 Somewhere in the North Georgia creek like ghost-muscle tensing
 Forever, or on the high grass-bed
 Yellow of dawn, catch like a man stamp-printed by God-
 shock, blue as the very foot
 Of fire. Catch into the hunted
 Horns of the buck, and thus into the deepest hearing —
 Nerveless, all bone, bone-tuned
 To leaves and twigs — with the grass drying wildly

When you woke where you stood with all blades rising
Behind you, and stepped out
 possessing the trail,
The racked bramble on either side shining
Like a hornet, your death drawing life
From growth
 from flow, as in the gill-cleansing turn
Of the creek
 or from the fountain-twist
Of flight, that rounds you
Off, and shies you downwind
Side-faced, all-seeing with hunger,
And over this, steep and straight-up
 In the eagle's mile
Let Adam, far from the closed smoke of mills
And blue as the foot
Of every flame, true-up with blind-side outflash
 The once-more instantly
Wild world: over Brasstown Bald
 Splinter uncontrollably whole.

* B.A., 1949, M.A., 1950, Vanderbilt University; Sewanee Rev. Fellow, 1954-55; Guggenheim Fellow, 1962-63; National Inst. Grantee, 1966; Poetry Consultant to the Library of Congress, 1966-68; currently Poet in Residence and Professor of English, University of South Carolina. Recipient Union League Prize, 1958; Vachel Lindsay Award, 1959; Longview Award, 1959; National Book Award for Poetry, 1965; Melville Cane Award, 1965-66.

