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Abbie Huston Evans

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The Back Road

Abbie Huston Evans

Perhaps I needed something gray and brown
And did not know it, —something spent and bare,
That morning on the back-road, in November.
I may have stood in need of something bedded
Like the ledge beside me barnacled with lichen,
With a great wave of juniper breaking on it;
Or darkly needed something straight like cedars,
Black on the traveling cloud-fringe, —something steady,
Like slate-gray mountains in behind bare birches.
Perhaps I needed something bright and scarlet,
Like winter berries on the stone-gray bush
Beside the rock-pile, —something sweet and singing,
Like water in the gutter running down
From springs up in the pasture out of sight.

But if I needed these, I did not know it.
If you had told me that I wanted fullness,
Or life, or God, I should have nodded “Yes”;
But not a bush of berries, —not a mountain!
—Yet so it was: fantastic needs like these,
Blind bottom hungers like the urge in roots,
Elbowed their way out, jostling me aside;
A need of steadiness, that caught at mountains,
A need of straightness, satisfied with cedars,
A need of brightness, cozened with a bush.

—Whatever it was I needed, know I found it!
The oak-tree standing with its feet in water
Behind me, with the wind hoarse in its top
Of paper, or the thousand-penciled bushes
Across the road, or alders black with catkins,
Fed no more deeply on the earth than I, —
Nor half so passionately, I must think,
As I, who, rooted in my tracks, appeased
Undreamed-of hungers with unlikeliest food,
The first at hand; amazed to find what sweetness
Can be wrung out of clay and flint, —amazed,
Like a starving man in a swamp, to find what relish
Is hid in grass, and bark, and roots, and acorns.

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