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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, now 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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