

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.

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