

Clarity of Cold



I have often remembered those grade school films of men battling the elements of inclement regions for the sake of science. Aside from the joy they brought by breaking the horror of a pubescent classroom – they always gave me pause – to wonder why people would isolate themselves on a tundra for months on end, confined with professional compatriots, tethered to home only by wave radios with fuzzy, uncontrolled jerks of audio. The apparent bleakness of such an existence was reinforced by images of a limitless blank horizon and meager, overwhelmed bodies huddled under the weight of fur and fiber – peaking out into an environment where they clearly do not belong.

I have seen many such a New England morning – with polar bears and penguins replaced by a few errant cardinals and hyperactive squirrels, their tails seemingly inflated in a meek effort of confused insulation. It is interesting, however, that like my Antarctic brethren, I find a strange contentment – even some twisted form of spiritual peace – when subjected to intense cold on an icy dawn. Those mornings bring a blueness to all things – somehow the earth merges itself with the surrounding air and intensifying passionate sky. It is shocking in its clarity – as if all vestiges of warmth have been wrung out and dried away on blocks of ice under a frigid sun. It is brilliantly bitter. Undeniable. The air is abrasive and unrepentant in its lack of social graces. It does not just assault one's presence – but slowly and deliberately rakes itself over you looking for weaknesses. It is a test – a challenge of Yankee fortitude – to function, nay enjoy, such hostility.

Even the trees appear tender and brittle – quivering in hope that the muscled, jagged crossing of such weather will leave them be- their long creaking rasp echoing off the hardened white woodland floor.

But as in all elements of my birthright – it provides a seasonal experience that has its place on the roster of ritual. So when faced with such a day – I approach it conversely, and with great purpose, to take minutes of madness – grossly underdressed mind you – to awaken my heart and enliven my soul. The balmy humid days of summer are innately lethargic and while I enjoy their time, they do seem to soften challenges and deaden intensity. Heat -like New Orleans - is a slow meander through a sticky, sweet and unpaced daily regimen – topped with a mint julep for good measure. No wonder we imbibe so much stout, black coffee – it is a standard inoculation – hot, brisk, vigorous and urgent. So a concentrated jaunt to the woodshed, to grope over frozen wooden splits adhered. It carries me to well-worn novels in the study – of sleigh rides, coarse farm living, candle lit homesteads, neighbors and shared hearths. Tossing each log upon my outstretched arm, juggling the disparity of size and fit, seeing my breath billow in clouds, acknowledging the continued aging of cedar shingles against the reflective snows - each step, each task, seems to carry a legacy of hard earned repetitiveness – for myself and those before. It provides an ancient, time worn reflection – served against a stinging chill of morning and the amber blue lights of dawn. It is a time where skin loses resilience and transforms – stretching tightly at first – then hardening quickly off to a thin breakable porcelain. It forces an instinctual test of movement of one's face as the multitudes of slender stings begin to pierce the skin. The body wishes to find retreat – to wrap itself in layers upon layer of comfort – but the mind seeks none and eagerly throws open the sash. Yes- I am awake – with eyes wide. I am resolve. Action. Focus. Purpose.

