

Appalachian Winter

November 19, 2018

By Kelly Morgan

It is nearing winter in Appalachia. The sycamores know:
They are shedding the last of their laughing leaves into the river below, keeping only those
skeletal branches, hardened for storm-weather.
The moss hugs close; the ferns dip under what leaves and branches they can find.
The rocks and ground have been left unattended.

The trees, in their solitary clusters, pull away from the bark and sapwood,
nestling into that aged heartwood inside.
They have already undressed for the cold;
They have begun communicating with their roots, not their branches.

The animals – squirrel, mouse, cardinal – cast about for the discarded clothes of the trees,
extra padding for their nests and burrows.
What birdsong there may yet be is obscured by the churn of the river.

All life has retreated within itself, as though it is the season for quiet meditation.

If I sit here long enough, perhaps I, too, will morph into my winter self.
Pale limbs stretched like the branches above me, moss growing where I once wore clothing,
hair shaggy and tangled into the roots and branches of the world nearby,
soul finding some inner place beyond cold.

I will learn, perhaps, if those laconic spirits around me
use the coldest months for singular contemplation, or if, instead, they all reach
into secret meeting spaces deep under the ground – below such things as frost and thaw –
and continue whatever palendric conversation they were having above.

If I let my feet twine with the roots of this sycamore, maybe I too will share in a sentence of this
conversation.

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