

SEEING

The bear went over the mountain to see what he could see.

And what did he see? What was the ruffle and sheen of his seeing? Was it pitched ~ as pitched as the climb that brought him to tiptop? Was it earnest? Was it brave? Was it sight redoubled, sight beyond seeing, circumambient, far and near and wide and round and endless, or did he rise like a specter from treeline and find himself thwarted by battlements of cloud?

The mountains talk and walk about me as I sleep.

So began the mysterious counsel of Dogen, and as I read him, wanting to see as I went like the bear to the top of the mountain, I vowed never again to sleep. And, whenever I found myself tiring or faltering on my way up the mountain, I would think not only of the bear and what prospect he might come to, I would take the small word *sleep* and hack from it with my ice axe first the lulling 'l' and then, my energy failing fast, the ponderous 'p' and I would have before me in my tiredness the simple word ~ *see*. For I wanted to see when I came to the top not only mountains but mountains all around me walking and talking in their way that my customary way might change and, more, that everything I knew and felt and considered *down off the mountain* would never, could never, be the same again.

Diana at her sylvan spring did not ever want to be seen.

But one of the dryads, fern-quiet in the shade of a mighty oak, *she* wanted to be seen. But she wondered: who would see me in all my nothingness? who could see me in this darksome, blanketing shade?

What do you see from the very top of a mountain?

It was the carefully placed *very* that threw me. The question had come from a nine-year-old boy. I didn't want ~ by answering carelessly ~ to fumble it away. So I came at it sideways, as if I were approaching an appallingly steep slope of late-winter snow where, taking slow, single steps forward, a single wrong step could kill me. I replied: *When I come to the very top of a mountain I take from the left breast pocket of my parka a small stone. I place this stone on what seems the very top of the mountain. Then I carefully step onto the stone ~ with both feet, if I can. Then I look all around me, and I see, clearly, that I am seeing maybe a half inch higher and farther than anyone else who has come to the mountain before me has ever seen, and I am happy.* The nine-year-old boy seemed happy, too.

Seeing at fifty should be seeing (all over again) at five.

What the nursery rhyme doesn't tell us ~ because it happened long after the rhymist had called it a day ~ is that the bear went to the top of the mountain a thousand times, and then a thousand times more. He went up each time to see, of course. But each successive time he found himself on the tiptop what he saw when he spun himself around like a dancer on ice was *every single time* a new and different thing. Once he saw fire. Once he saw a bluebird so enormous it filled the sky with its blueness. And once he saw, looking out as far as he could see, the heart of something. It was still, but the more he strained his eyes to see, he could see it was also not-still and, as he strained to see farther out than he had ever seen, he saw in this far-off not-stillness at once everything and nothing

at all. All that had been and all that was majestically, momentously, and magically yet to come.
And the mountains all around him were moving.

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