

My Dog Doesn't Know It's Her Birthday

My dog doesn't know it's her birthday. I tell her, but she seems happy in the usual way about the extra peanut butter treat. A beetle doesn't know I won't crush it, and runs from the shadow its instinct reads. A loon can't know her cry moves into the empty room in my chest and sounds like the set of wooden blocks we use to make what we call music. The leaves of a ginkgo tree don't know they look like fans (an idea we took from them) but move in wind as they have for hundreds of millions of years -- because flat leaves capture more light than the needles they evolved from, over all the epochs we've named. A ginkgo goes on expressing itself (that wouldn't be the word) (but then, it doesn't need a word) -- let's say it perpetuates, or bears forth generations, all of whom love the feeling of sun gathering on their broad faces. I mean, because I love that sensation, the seep, the press of something alive and unskinned against my cheek, I see the same in them.

Here on the south end of Lake Bemidgi (in Ojibwe, *Bemidigmaag*: lake with crossing waters) the Mississippi River enters and mingles and the gentle tide laps at the shoreline the hotels cleared and filled with sand. Minnows swim among the dark, mossy rocks, and Merganser chicks practice diving after them. This morning, a bathospheric drone is gauging the lake bottom and finds it's eight feet deep as far out as a thousand feet from shore. The lake doesn't know it's being measured. The drone looks like a skinny goose lashed to a pontoon. It knows to do what it's told to do. For no purpose but ours, meaning the future construction of docks for launching giant tricycles that allow a pair of humans to pedal across the surface of the water for a fee.

This aspen tree might know I'm right here next to it. It quakes in wind and so that's its name. Quaking Aspen. Sometimes I quake in wind so what's *my* name?

I walk along the shore.

My chest fills up with loon.

What do *I* know about who else is here, what shadows might decide to come close or pass me by, or return and sidle up for purposes entirely their own?

My dog cut her paw last week and I took her to the vet for stitches. What is that to her – a help? I try to say, in the language of peanut butter treats, that often, things actually do have to get worse before they get better (there’s a bandage on her shaved leg and a cone around her neck), still, I don’t think any of this is clear to her.

One of the elders wrote about it this way:

*Where was I going I can't
go to now, unless hurting?*

In a dream, her sandal broke and she had no idea how to go on – walk on sharp stones? Go barefoot, in dirt? And if she chose not to move, that place was changed too:

*Where am I standing if I'm
to stand still now?*

Her dream ended there in that open space, her questions passed along to us.

It's late morning now, in this little copse at the edge of the lake. I have no idea what's being said in clouds, air, light, or underground, or underwater, in the worlds below. By all the others. But here we are, on this makeshift beach with trucked in sand.

I rearrange my words on a little pad, and this Aspen shivers its leaves in wind.

*(*italicized lines are from Denise Levertov's poem "The Broken Sandal")*

