



Autumn Light
Bald River Falls, Eastern Tennessee
Photo by Dan Hardison

Directions

By Billy Collins

The best time is late afternoon
when the sun strobes through
the columns of trees as you are hiking up,
and when you find an agreeable rock
to sit on, you will be able to see
the light pouring down into the woods
and breaking into the shapes and tones
of things and you will hear nothing
but a sprig of birdsong or the leafy
falling of a cone or nut through the trees,
and if this is your day you might even
spot a hare or feel the wing-beats of geese
driving overhead toward some destination.

But it is hard to speak of these things
how the voices of light enter the body
and begin to recite their stories
how the earth holds us painfully against
its breast made of humus and brambles
how we who will soon be gone regard
the entities that continue to return
greener than ever, spring water flowing
through a meadow and the shadows of clouds
passing over the hills and the ground
where we stand in the tremble of thought
taking the vast outside into ourselves.