Alpine Senses; Nights Allowed

Paul Nagy*

*Iowa State University

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I can’t forget the time we spent
in our grey and green tent
in the mountains that late summer:
of our hiking to the peel of shoulders,
burned and grated, the heavy sun
and strappy backpacks taking their toll;
of a few warm days of tepid bathing,
sponge-showers taken in the woods
from buckets hung on branches;
and of the hot sweaty fluff
of swollen mummy sleeping bags
soaked with our love.
To dry them out—
even in the warm Colorado sun—
took all day;
like the aspens,
we absorbed the sunshine
and returned it to the meadows.

Still, I remember
the nights better—
At sundown,
hotly brown hills
gave up their anger to the evening clouds
and it cooled outside, almost as if
answering our request.
Those sirloin steaks cooked up well,
their char-broil spatters lofting over our camp
like the moths that flittered around our light.
We boiled water in a blackened pot, large and battered,
to wash our dirty dishes in;
we drank Yukon Jack and lime juice from cups of paper
and the snake venom heated us,
loosened our tongues and noses
to the treats the night brought along,
moon-cool Rocky Mountain breezes
of piney sapwood smells.
The mountain immersed us in forest.
We tightly held onto these few nights
like we made our campfires, the ones which crackled and seared each suppertime;
we refused to allow them escape from us—
denying them any rest
and feeding them twigs until dawn—
and they smoked our clothes, our tent,
our sleeping bags,
musky,
leaving their mark in order not to be forgotten
yet still leaving.