



Photograph by Cheryl Harrison

Brown Mountain Lights

The road oxbows
around a grass island; a hill
clips it to the right.
Moving south, its gray flatness
fades into immense black,
a gap narrowing in the treeline.

It takes minutes to see that.
Darkness strains between a shout
and its echo.
A light angles down the former slope,
dipping inside the mountain.
surging closer in blinding mitosis —
a star that novas into double suns.

The car turns off the parkway, swinging
an awkward arc through the trees;
headlight beams collapse, after-
images of catching the day full-face.
The wind whirs stiff weeds.
Other cars aim a broadside
of dirty grill and glass out over
the blue foxfire of Blowing Rock,
past the dull haze of Lenoir
to the foothill called Brown Mountain.

The overlook is quiet; people whisper
inside cars. Some stand stiff-armed
beside their trucks, hands deep
in pockets, shoulders hunched.
A cloudless white-breath night.

Two miles off a yellow spot appears
then wanes. Another, flashing, rolls
easily at a slope then shoots skyward.
Three white ones burn out slowly, dim
to bright to dim again, vanish.

In the rubber comfort of cars
these images dissolve into brain.
Some neck and guess; skeptics out-logic
the proofs; still others accept the legend:
a batch of incandescent moonshine
in quart jars glittering by the mash-tub.

The Lights tumble until morning,
signaling to empty overlooks and trees,
needing no viewers, giving nothing
to locomotives left trackless in a flood
a hundred years ago, to imagined streetlamps
and cars driving on roads never built,
or to fires burning all night
on smokeless green hills.

Ken Chamlee

I watched the shadow fade away
and I knew I'd never touch
the origin of that shadow -
the one I loved so much.

But shadows are deceiving
Sometimes big — sometimes small
Still yet there are shadows
with no origin at all.

Robert Hopkins

Ax Helve Remembered

Mr. Frost,

I've watched ivory curls of hickory
drop to floor from plane
that coaxed the hard, firm grain
into handle smooth enough for hand
to grip the wood and in a swing
slide to handle butt
without thought of hurting flesh.

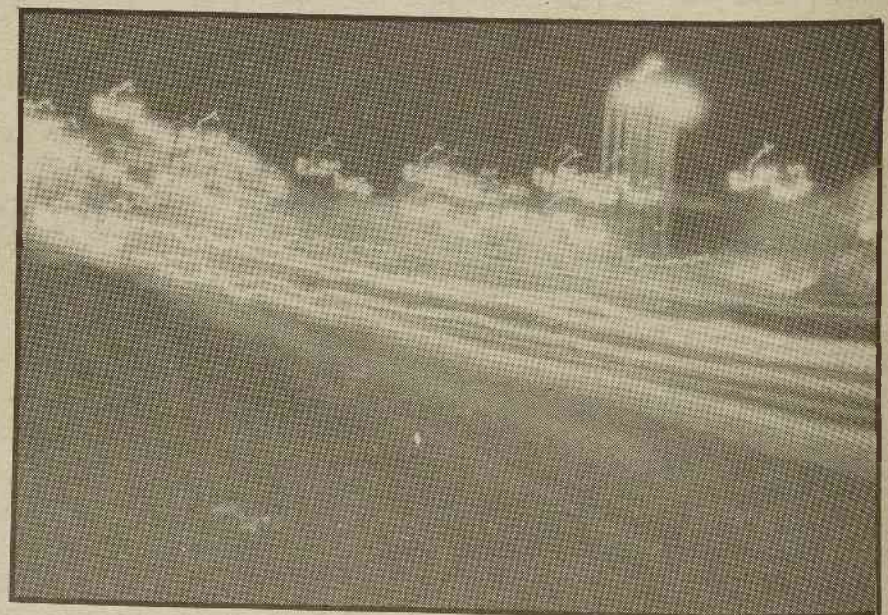
I've smelled shavings' aroma like hickory nuts
that on a breezy autumn drop from limbs
unclothing to the ground
crisp and warmly covered brown-gold
by leaves so glorious in smell and sound
my foot longs each October to toss again,
to hear the crackle and the rustle,
to awaken the calling fragrance
of autumn leaves and hickory nuts.

I've smelled the strong burn
kindled by ivory curled shavings
when tongues of fire danced and
frolicked upward in space--casting
glow from warm brick hearth;
there's no hotter endurance than hickory--
logs piled at even
bring bright glow heat 'til morn.

I've watched muscled sinews stretch and pull
in weathered arms shaping ax helve
from pole of hickory bough;
his frame shaped and strengthened
by seasons of living with nature.

Like the hickory--clean, tall, enduring he grew,
and no one better than he knew
the strength the limb took,
the wear the limb gave,
the night hours it took to shave
by degrees the hard-grained wood
until at last the artwork stood
ax helve exacted by eye and strength,
ax helve to lend enduring strength
together nature's pair
to wrest the living
in tune with nature's giving.

Mozelle Vickers



Photograph by Chris Perry