

HAL BORLAND QUOTES



from *Twelve Moons of the Year*
(published around 1978)

SUNSET, when a day of melting and a night and a day of freezing have sheathed the countryside in ice. Long light glows on the crusted meadow. Broad purple pools of shadow lie in every hollow.

IS THERE ANYTHING more beautiful...than a snowdrift curled in the shape of the storm's breath?

DAYLIGHT has already begun to lengthen. The sun will be above the horizon six minutes longer today than it was two weeks ago, and a week from today it will have added another eight minutes to its stay. By the end of January another forty minutes will have been added to the daylight...Ursa Major, the Big Bear, no longer drags his tail on the horizon as he climbs the northern sky in the evening.

OURS HAPPENS to be a land where the mountain barriers lie the wrong way to temper the winter winds. Our storms move from west to east across the country, and the winds generally come down from the north and northwest. Our mountain chains make great valleys that actually funnel those winds down across the flatlands. They come howling, like the vanished wolf packs, and blow till they have blown themselves out.

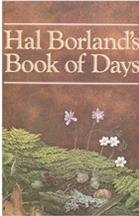
JANUARY'S FULL MOON marks a time of bitter temperatures and biting wind. The ice now lies deep, the drifts are piled high in the woods.

SOMETIMES THE JANUARY WIND seems to come from the farthest star... That is the wind of a January dawn, in the half-light that trembles between day and night. It is a wind that merely quivers the trees, its force sensed but not seen, a force that might almost hold back the day if it were so directed. Then the east brightens, and the wind relaxes – the stars, its source, grown dim.

JANUARY EVENING: Sunset leaves a glow like a faint blush on the hilltops. It slowly flows down across the valley, a pinkly luminous shadow. The wind, which all day has been re-drifting the snow, filling paths and smothering footprints, eases away...Slowly the pink glow fades, leaving a shadowless, lusterless world of white.

THE COUNTRYMAN rubs his nose with a mittened hand, warms it for a moment. It is a cold January night. Zero and falling. He knows without looking at the thermometer, for he hears the whistling whine of his footsteps in the snow.

THE PRIMITIVE SLEEP: The woodchuck sleeps in mysterious hibernation...Half the year the woodchuck is a normal warm-blooded mammal. Then he retires to a hole in the ground and retreats millions of years, biologically speaking. In effect, he becomes his own remote ancestor, a cold-blooded creature whose temperature is only a few degrees above that of his surroundings and whose breathing and pulse are almost suspended. Comatose, he waits out the winter, close kin of the primitive frog and the lizard. Winter past, he spans the ages again in a matter of hours and becomes warm-blooded once more.



from *Book of Days* (1976)

(JAN 23)

I KNOW BEST THIS VALLEY with the brooks and river that mark it. It is the dominant geographic feature of my life... I am also keenly aware of the mountain that flanks my side of the river. The river is flowing water. It rises in the hills to the north and it flows to the ocean a hundred miles to the south. Like all streams flowing into the ocean more or less at sea level, my river is salty for some distance above its mouth... But I live well about tidewater. The river I know day by day is freshwater, carrying only a normal amount of sediment and minerals in solution-and the customary amount of pollution found in American streams.

BUT THIS RIVER, POLLUTION AND ALL, is typical of all rivers in many ways. I get pleasure from having it close by, and I profit from it in minor ways. It somehow tempers the climate, both winter and summer. In summer it is the source of heavy dews that help water my fields and my garden. Any stream does these things. Because it is flowing water, it helps create eddies in the air along the whole valley. These eddies create wind currents. In summer, for instance, there is nearly always a breeze in the valley, especially at night. On the other hand, on a hot, still summer day the whole valley may swelter under a blanket of vapor-we call it high humidity, which means the same thing-from the river. In winter, the river's humidity can add authority to low temperatures and make a chill wind bitter. Occasionally its slight warmth changes a snowstorm into slush or cold rain. There have been times when higher land only two miles away but out of the river's direct influence received four inches of snow and this valley got rain but no snow.

All these minor matters of weather are a result of the flowing water in the river and the vapor that rises from it. Just across the mountain to the northwest lies a small lake, a deep pool of still water created by the Ice Age. It, too, affects the weather in its valley. Summer nights along its shore are cool and breezy. Mild weather continues somewhat longer there than it does here, just across the mountain, because the lake's deep, still water tempers the air longer than does the flowing water here. But when deep cold strikes and the lake freezes over, it acts as an outdoor refrigerator for the whole valley. Its ice persists weeks longer than does the ice in my flowing river, and its shores have a later spring.

Since the lake and the river are less than two miles apart at this point, the differences in their seasons and weather are striking proof of the contrasting effects of standing water and water that flows.

(JAN 26)

Most of the water we know and use every day is freshwater, distilled from the oceans by the sun...Pure water is almost unknown in nature, simply because water is one of the best natural solvents there is. Water vapor is relatively pure, but even the water in rain clouds contains minerals in minute quantities because fine dusts float in the air and its mineral content is absorbed by the vapor...We speak of rain water being "soft" because it seldom contains the lime that "hardens" most ground water.

The spring water we use is relatively "hard" because it comes from seepage through a variety of rocks, including limestone. THIS IS A LIMESTONE AND MARBLE AREA. BUT THAT ROCK ALSO CONTAINS MINUTE AMOUNTS OF IRON, COPPER, AND OTHER MINERALS, ALL MILDLY SOLUBLE IN WATER. It is these minerals that give water its taste...Well water, no matter from what depth

it comes, always has a certain amount of mineral content because it flows through layers of rock or sand to reach the point from which it is pumped.

(JAN 27)

Ice is nothing but solidified water. We happen to live on a planet where the normal temperatures keep most of the water in a liquid state. But this same normal temperature keeps steel in its solid form...

Ice forms crystals that are six-sided. IN THAT SENSE, ICE HAS SOME REMOTE RELATIONSHIP TO GRANITE, the crystals of which are also six-sided. But the most familiar ice crystal formations are snowflakes...

(FEB 2)

When the early English colonists arrived here they mistook the big American marmot for a badger, [and] called it a groundhog... And just to round out the packet of errors, the name "woodchuck" comes from the Algonquian word "wejack," which to the Indians meant the fisher, a larger member of the weasel family, and no kin whatever to our present-day woodchuck.

(FEB 3)

Hibernation... is a suspended animation that is deeper than sleep, deeper even than a coma, for it involves a slowdown of all the bodily processes to a point far below normal. It approaches death without quite going over the threshold. That spark of life is still alive, though it is only a spark...

Some insects hibernate in caterpillar form, notably the little moth *Isia Isabella* which becomes the woolly-bear caterpillar. Woolly bears find hiding places in barns and sheds and under bark on trees where they freeze solid, and yet thaw and come back to active life in the spring, pupate, become moths, lay eggs, hatch into caterpillars, and continue the cycle. I have taken a woolly bear from a beam in my woodshed in January, when it was frozen as hard as a pretzel, put it under a jelly glass on my desk, and watched it thaw, come to life, and look around for food. When I put it back on the beam, it curled up and froze solid again, apparently with no ill effects.

(FEB 4)

Earliest of all the spring flowers, skunk cabbage occasionally appears in January. That strange, primitive-looking hood shields an even more primitive flower stalk, a fleshy, thumblike core on which many small blossoms appear. These blossoms exude the odor of rotting flesh and attract a species of fly, one of the earliest insects. They fertilize the flowers which to some people have an overtone of garlic smell, much like that of a skunk. This odor appears whenever a stem or leaf of the plant is broken; it marks the juice.

Skunk cabbage is an arum, cousin of the jack-in-the-pulpit. All arums are perennial, all have peppery juice and need damp footing. But only the skunk cabbage pokes its snout up through the ice.

(FEB 5)

All plants at the time of blossoming generate heat, what we would call "running a fever."... An emerging skunk cabbage hood sometimes has as much as twenty-seven degrees more warmth than the surrounding soil and air. That is why those sheaths coming up through the ice, even in February, are surrounded by a small patch of melt.

(FEB 7)

Rain today, but not really a February thaw. Only rain, and February rain is cold and cheerless. It smells of ice and it has a touch of sleet even when it does not freeze as it falls.

(FEB 9)

Tests prove that wind of the same speed exerts 25 percent more force in January than it does in July. That is because there is more substance to the air in cold January than in warm air. That is one reason a dog pants and we breathe faster in summer than in winter. We have to get more air into our lungs to get the same amount of oxygen from it.

The substance of the air is also responsible for sound. Sound travels faster in thin, warm air than it does in thick, cold air, but it sounds louder in cold air because more of the vibrations are transmitted.

(FEB 10)

The sun now sinks forty minutes later than it did a month ago. And it rises almost half an hour earlier in the morning.

(FEB 12)

TO KNOW THE FEBRUARY FULL MOON as it rises in the brittle eastern sky is to know both awe and shivering wonder. It is round as a medallion, bright as burnished brass, but its light has no more warmth than the frost cloud of a man's breath. It is a false and lifeless sun that makes false daylight of the night. It kills the lesser stars and reduces the constellations to fundamentals. It burns the darkness with neither heat nor smoke, strewing the snow with charred skeletons of the naked trees. No wonder the Indians knew the February full moon as the Hunger Moon.

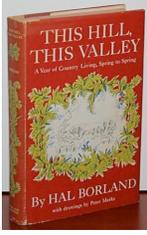
Tonight the moon's edges will be frostbitten and it will rise an hour later. Tomorrow night it will be still another hour laggard and its rim will begin to crumble. And night by night more stars will creep back and begin to claim the darkness. Day by day the sun will move a fraction of a degree toward March and the equinox. The Hunger Moon will have passed its prime.

(FEB 25)

WE ARE ALWAYS IMPATIENT FOR THE FIRST MIGRANT BIRDS TO RETURN, mostly because their arrival means that seasonal change is at hand. We start looking for them about now, though we know it is too early by two or three weeks. Only the rarest of early springs would bring them north this far the last week in February. But almost every year I SEE A FLOCK OF MIGRANT RED-WING BLACKBIRDS IN THE TREES ALONG THE RIVER before mid-March, and soon after them there is a flock of migrant robins in the big pasture back of our house.

All migrant birds wait for hospitable weather. ROBINS AND RED-WINGS RATHER CLOSELY FOLLOW THE NORTHWARD ADVANCE OF THE THIRTY-FIVE DEGREE ISOTHERM. Watch the weather map, and when that isotherm approaches you can begin to look for the birds. Apparently it takes that temperature to bring out the insects on which they feed.

Spring migration is always slower than fall migration. among the smaller birds, most of the seed-eaters prefer to migrate by day and rest at night. The insect-eaters, such as robins, usually make migrant flights at night and feed in the daytime...Swallows and other birds that catch and eat insects in flight are an exception. But once at their destination, they all revert to their normal habits.



from *This Hill This Valley* (1957)

Indians called this the Wolf Moon, knowing well the time when fangs were eager and hunger drove the pack. Most of the wolves are gone, but the fangs remain, fangs of ice and cold, the great primal forces of Winter's depth. The wind courses the valleys and harries the hills, and the long nights have sharpened its fangs. The ice lies deep.

In some lands there are mountain barriers to the Winter wind, but our geography has no such design. Our mountain chains, for the most part, lie with the wind which moves down from the north. The great valleys merely funnel the gales so that they howl unfettered and roar across the flatlands until they have run themselves down. Our Winter winds have few barriers. Even the trees stand naked, to sigh and moan as the wind whips through them, freighted with snow and ice or merely freighted with cold.

Ice sheaths the ponds and clogs the streams. It thrusts at the banks with its own fangs. But more than that, it gnaws at the hills. It thrusts a hidden fang into the granite of the hilltop and rips the rocks apart. Ledges that can defy all other elements begin to crumble away beneath the ice, which can come from as impalpable a thing as a wisp of mist or as fragile a thing as a snowflake. Ice, the sharpest fang of all, and the most persistent.

Even under an overcast sky, a snow-covered night is not a night of darkness. It is a time of black and white and gray, all faintly aglow; and once the human eye has accommodated to it there is much to be seen and even more to be sensed...It is a world without shadows, for what light there is comes from the snow-covered earth rather than from the sky, a reflected light. Trees are stark outlines. Bushes are vague shapes. Snowdrifts banish in a common blur that has no small contours.