



### **FOND FAREWELLS FOR FALL - Part 1**

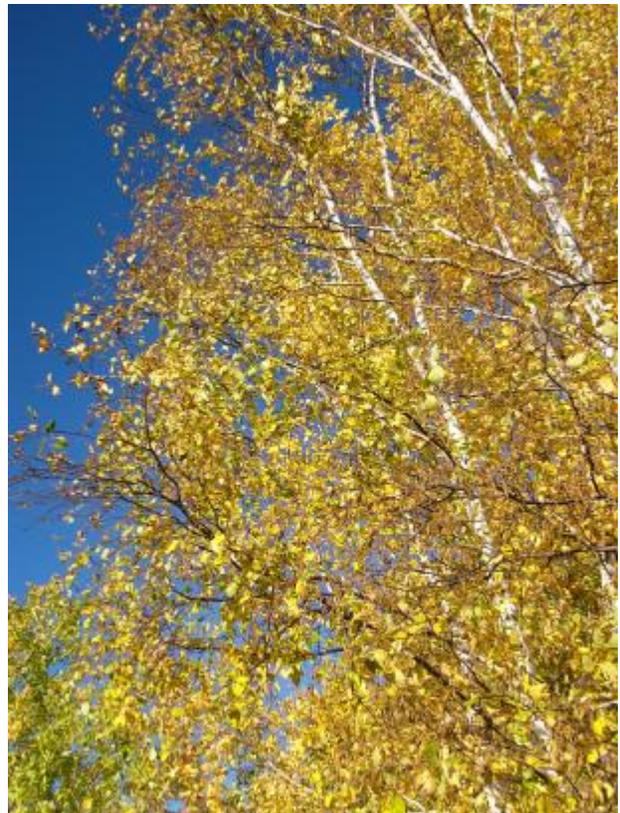
*“Who’d believe that it’s the same world that was so lush and green and alive just a few months ago when we begged for relief from a merciless sun?” A.C. Woltz*

Six hours and thirty-three minutes. That represents how much less sunlight we experience on October 31, compared with the date that summer officially began. That was when life was green and smiled on us like a benevolent nursemaid. Now she doesn’t care, and has informed us in no uncertain terms by her behaviour that she soon will be leaving, deserting us to winter. If we aren’t prepared then it’s too bad; she’s leaving anyway.

From the tundra south she has been sweeping the gold from the trees and the green from the grass. She then steps aside while old man winter breathes his frigid breath, causing lakes to mist, and deadly crystals to appear on delicate leaves, killing them in a few short hours and turning the magic of their greenery to black. The nodding wildflowers have bowed their last and their costumes are now frayed and colourless.

Norm, my fuzzy, four-legged companion and I left at early morning to survey the progression of this season called Fall, so aptly named because that, more than anything else, is what happens. Fall is not kind to my canine friend, but I bring him along anyway. My only complaint is that he is an unwilling collector of seeds. Any plant that produces a hitchhiker loves dogs like Norm.

Black, dark brown, light brown and dull shades of yellow seem to be the predominate colours of the forest floor. Of course this is after the vibrant golds, yellows, and occasional reds of fallen deciduous leaves have breathed their last. The ferns no longer sway like sultan fans but their spores have already been dispersed guaranteeing other ferns in other places in other times. The lily-shaped leaves of bunchberries and clintonia or corn lily are already decomposing. But it has been a good season for them and their seeds, couched in tasty berries, are distributed far and wide by



birds and small mammals. (Already Norm is 'collecting' and the spherical Velcro studded seed pods of burdock are enmeshed in the fine white hair on his chest and legs. If Norm were more like a fox his hair wouldn't be so likely to pick up every seed asking for a ride.)

The bush is ominously quiet. What does it know? What can it know? The few birds that flit through the trees are either migrating or foraging to build a healthy layer of fat to help them through the lean months. The only bird call comes from the flash of blue and white, the blue jay, whose arrogant cries defy the coming famine. High above, a fine 'v' of migrating Canada geese wends its way southward seeking a more plentiful food supply. The distant tapping of a hairy woodpecker reminds us that there are a few birds that will remain. Along with the downy woodpecker and larger pileated woodpecker, it will forage throughout the winter, providing life for itself through the death of many hundreds of insects in various stages of their life cycles. The woodpecker's cousins, the flickers and sapsuckers have already left. The nighthawks, those flying insect eaters that ply the air in early evening began to leave sometime around mid to late August. A sudden frost could spell the

quick demise of their food supply and they weren't about to chance that.

I stop on a rocky ridge to rest and Norm cannot understand why. Off he goes, exploring and collecting again while I survey the bush-scape. In summer I could never



have seen that rocky ridge a kilometre away. A large dark shape wanders on that ridge, its nose to the ground. It is a black bear enjoying the last few weeks of foraging before it must succumb to drowsiness that will last until spring. Once it enters its den under the tangles of a windfall or hastily dug into the loose soil on the side of a hill, it will sleep without eating or drinking until spring. It will awake on occasion but in most instances will grunt, roll over, and go back to sleep. I'm glad the bear is so far away. Norm has the feistiness of a terrier and I have no idea what he would do if confronted with a bruin that decided it wouldn't be treed by a medium-size dog.