

## *Welcome, Autumn*

Autumn, the raciest of the four maidens, arrives Sunday. She trips in officially at 5:51 a.m. (EDT). My love affair with this wild and tempestuous woman – who garbs herself in garments rich and robust in color – will begin.

No shy and retiring matriarch is she. Her majesty is robed in oxblood and cordovan, butter-yellow and brown, red-purple and apricot-lavender. She is a show-off, but I am smitten by her charms and I am under her spell.

She comes to the green-carpeted valleys and monarchial peaks of Southeast Tennessee with all the boldness of a lover come home, certain that she will be greeted with open arms. And she is. Oh, how I have missed her. Our relationship is founded on the good times we have spent together, and the promise of those we shall experience afresh this year. With her, I long to ...

- Wade barefoot over smooth pebbles in a cool brook.
- Lie in the warm sun and drink in the grandeur of a far-off, hazy mountain ridge.
- Watch as a full harvest moon creeps above a distant cornfield and casts a shimmering path of gold across a dark lake.
- Pick blushing-red dogwood berries from low-hanging limbs, and throw them at a playful squirrel scampering up a black oak tree.
- Gaze spellbound as the sun burns its radiance through the crimson leaves of a black gum tree.
- Enjoy the hushed stillness as we listen to the mournful, faraway sounds of a whippoorwill.
- Pucker up, as we sample a not-yet-ripe persimmon.
- Warm our feet by the crackling embers of a campfire and inhale the aroma of burning hickory.
- Share melted, toasted marshmallows impaled on a long maple limb.
- Drink in the purple hues of the white oak and winged sumac trees as we wander through the glade.
- Sit on a rail fence and witness the wind cavorting across a field of reddish-brown sage grass, creating ocean-like waves.
- Recline against a sycamore tree at river's edge, with a cane pole resting on my knees, only occasionally glancing at a red-and-white float bobbing in the water.
- Play in a windfall of leaves, pitching them above our heads and watching their graceful, circuitous path to the ground again.
- Marvel at the orange cast of a sunset as it matches the patches of a showy quilt in the woodlands and is reflected in her eyes.

(more)

Is it any wonder that I love her and long to see her, to be with her again?  
Autumn, come quickly. And let's romp through nature's paradise together.

I take my heart from summer and give it to you.

--Beecher Hunter