

Dreams on a midsummer night

Peter Reason sleeps among the sounds, scents and stillness of high season



Illustration by Dawn Cooper www.dawncooper.com

A blackbird sings as I walk up the lane in the gathering dusk, offering a last canticle to the closing day. I open the door through the high stone wall into the orchard, and settle myself on my sleeping pad in the corner. Jackdaws fly overhead in twos and threes, chattering volubly in staccato chips and cheeps, urgently going nowhere in particular. When at last they roost together in the nearby trees, the world becomes still and quiet. Bats flit across the sky. Every sound – the last trill of a bird, footsteps along the path, a neighbour calling her cat – stands out with crisp clarity against the underlying silence.

Far above the jackdaws' flight, blue seeps out of the sky as the light fades. In the deepening darkness, the oxeye daisies under the apple trees and the rose that rambles over the shed roof shimmer with a luminescent white, as if releasing all the sun's energy they have stored through the day. The apple trees hold on to the darkest of greens until finally

the night swallows all colour. And, as the heat of the day disperses, the smell of vegetation, a damp blend of life and decay, rises from the meadow grass.

After a sweltering day, I am sleeping in the cool of the orchard to mark this Midsummer Night, when Earth is most inclined toward the sun; an instant of change in the pattern of continuity. Thomas Berry tells us that to find a spirituality suited to contemporary humans we must participate in the sacred liturgy of the Earth itself: "We become sacred by our participation in this more sublime dimension of the world about us."

As I lie here gazing up at the first stars, with nothing to do but dwell in this moment and wait for sleep, I see how simple such a sacred practice can be: just to be out here in the orchard, under the sky, on Midsummer Night; to be present to the cosmic transition, not as mere objective phenomenon, but a movement in the subjectivity of the whole.

Yet as soon as I put words to it, they seem too fanciful. I am sleeping in the orchard on Midsummer Night.

I wake briefly at three, long enough to notice hints of dawn. At four, in the twilight, the blackbird is singing again, a lone voice breaking through the stillness. I lie half asleep, with fleeting memories of pleasant dreams and the sounds of birds drifting through me. After the blackbird, pigeons start coo-cooing to each other. Then the jackdaws rouse again, arguing with a few gulls. The air feels deliciously fresh. At last the early sun comes up over the trees, rising at such a high latitude that it lights up the north-facing wall. I am filled with that deep sense of quiet contentment that comes from feeling part of a wider whole. R

Peter Reason's latest book, *In Search of Grace: An Ecological Pilgrimage*, is published by Earth Books.

