

Just a Song at Twilight

We're watching quite a struggle these early autumn days, a tug – a -war between a hot, dry summer, bent on hanging on and a hesitant fall, whose hunters wonder if duck- hunting will ever be the same. Whoever heard of shooting ducks in 86 degree heat and all that sweat? I know, Californians.

Still, I've tried to be grateful for the hot days remembering last winter's dogged determination to hang on right through May. I asked God back during that heat to reserve a few of those hot days for January of 2024 when they'd be deeply appreciated. Right now, the climate change crowd is feeling justified and normal folks, screwed, wondering if this scrambled world will ever return to the good ol' days of predictable events.

A small side-bar here: the Elizabethans of Hamlet's time believed that when "the time is out of joint," the cause was never climate change; it was always the leadership: evil kings spawning evil times: weather, eclipses, earthquakes and all.

My response too all of this has been to sit evenings in my air-conditioned car and drink in the artistry of *The Old Master Painter* as He captures on my marsh the many sunset moods and mosaics his palate knife and brushstrokes create on a canvass that seldom seems to want to hold still. The reliable constant is that the finished work is usually a heart-moving water color masterpiece, reminding me that "the earth is full off the goodness of God." (Ps. 33:2 KJV)

Meanwhile, the citizens of the marsh perform their timeless rituals programmed into them by their Designer aeons ago. The muskrats push their silver salients across the glassy surface of the marsh, reflecting high above, the airliners leaving their silvery vapor trails against the tinted sky. (Souls; homeward bound for parts unknown. The wood duck family, shrunken now from nine to four passes

on its evening flight. All are now full grown and silhouetted; the males' matchless plumage, lost to the shadows.

Priesting the shoreline, the great blue herons, as if on cue, seek out their favorite shoreline points where they can stab a frog or two before retiring. Their cousins, the two cattle egrets, have a fallen tree limb on the far side of the marsh where they always put their heads under their wings and go to sleep half an hour before the herons. When darkness falls, they are reduced to two white ghostly blurs barely visible 200 yards away. Then "sleeps the milk-white egret like a ghost, as, like a ghost, you glimmer unto me." (Tennyson: "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal.")

The cousins of those beautiful birds, the snowy egrets, were once hunted almost to extinction for their delicate plumes, so envied by Las Vegas show girls and Hollywood costume artists. Today the snowys have made an amazing comeback, thanks to dedicated conservationists and the license fees most hunters gladly pay, hoping to keep their hunting grounds happy: undeveloped and undrained.

Still the twilight plays. The local red winged blackbirds, once perfectly spaced throughout the reeds, have joined the huge flocks pillaging the grain fields with the grackles and starlings, but on quieter evenings the bats put on their amazing display of erratic flight. The night hawks have long since flown south, with the swamp sparrows and marsh wrens. "The sedge is withered from the lake, / And no birds sing." (Keats)

"When the twilight is gone, / And no songbird is singing / When the twilight is gone / You come into my heart, / And here in my heart you will stay / While I pray / My prayer is to linger with you / At the end of the day / In a dream that's divine" ...

I'm sure oldsters will recognize that timeless Platters hit from 1956. They probably heard it, parked with their date in some secluded hide away. Such spots, like my marsh, can still be special simply for their beauty, which retains the power to lead old twilight lovers into into prayers of gratitude, perhaps remembering Keats' immortal lines, "Beauty is truth; truth beauty./ That is all we know on earth,/ And all we need to know." Those may have been inspired by Paul's deathless words to the Philippians: "Whatsoever is lovely; whatsoever is of good report ... If there be any virtue; if there be any praise, Think on these things."(4:8)
Gene Pinkney for The Daily News 23-10-07-