

Bring it On

The nights and days are almost equal now. The Goldenrod and Cosmos and Sedum are all alert as the elms and birches and poplars begin their descent into rest. I've called these days 'late summer' for as long as I could and now admit that the landscape has indeed slid into autumn. The tomatoes have slowed dramatically while the winter squash is on the rise. The gardens are defoliating and the prairie standards are dehydrating, gravity pulling them earthward.

The cast of the landscape runs yellow through orange. During last night's delicious sunset the world glowed from edge to horizon. The white farmhouse burned red all these miles from the sun. All pale things took on the pumpkin's hue. And even the forever-green Norway Spruce was lit bright orange at its top, a female grosbeak facing the sun trying to make the day last a little while longer; just like me.

The official length of a day's light is 13 hours 39 minutes today and that light is tumbling towards the winter shadow, losing three minutes every day and more until just before Christmas. Watchers of daylight have quiet little celebrations all over the hemisphere on December 22 as the days begin their slow ascent back to supremacy.

The chimney sweep will come on Monday to perform his rooftop magic over both of our wood stoves. That is surely a sign of what's to come. I wonder how old his profession is. I wonder if sometime during the era of cave dwellers some fellow thought to himself, while scouring his own crude chimney, "I'll bet the folks in the next cave over would pay good shells to have me clean theirs too." How long have there been chimneys anyway? I suppose as long as fires have been lit and tended indoors, cave or yurt, igloo or mud hut. The smoke has to go somewhere, right?

I've been reviewing with Veronica various plans for the coming season of snow. Where do we put the vehicles when the plowman is working? Is that new rose bush going to be englacialized by his leavings? How much equipment can we get into our old sheds? Is it time to build something new? Is it past time to build something new? How much wood and how much LP do we want to burn? Shall we try 50 degrees overnight?

There are two apples left in the apple tree, bright red and bird pecked; they are hanging on far longer than their contemporaries, kind of like Jim Thome or Brett Whatshisname. They have lasted through howling gales and lashing rain, continuous bird barrages and withering sun. Every night the deer come by to browse the ground for windfall and every morning those two survivors are still up there near the top more beautiful than ever. It was a great year for our apples, much larger and many more than last season. There is indeed some benefit in a season with twenty-five inches of rain.

Those continuous storms seem far away now, like the storms of '07. What is it about the weather? How can it be so important, such an overriding concern one week and a vague recollection one month later? I suspect it has something to do with protecting ones self from debilitating worry. If I sat around fretting about how rough another four inches of rain would be I think I would be frazzled forthwith. Fear can be incapacitating can't it? It's as true for the batter at the plate as it is for the soldier in the field. It's natural to fear a 100 mile per hour fastball just under your chin, makes plain sense. So I guess the trick is in how you handle that fear. Nothing wrong with being scared, plenty wrong with staying scared.

Which brings me back to the fall. It's the vague misgivings about the challenges to come that give autumn its melancholy edge. Taken on its own fall is stunningly beautiful, generally benign and altogether pleasant. Fall has apples and haystacks, football and cider, leafy splendor and the World Series. What's not to like? Yup, it's our misgivings about November through March that give the current season its disconcerting edge. Having said that I am hereby resolving to put the dark thoughts away and enjoy this glorious day, this marvelous season.

Bring it on. I'll take the fruit, I'll take the leaves and I'll take the Twins in seven.