

## Sweet Return

I sat out this evening and drank in the sweet return of spring. The cardinal is singing, promising romance and staking territory while the unmistakable trill of the red-winged blackbird floats in from the prairie. I think that maybe the prairie, all prairies, were created for these red wings. Perched atop waving stem or sturdy fence post he is the essence of the new season. Vernalia can not start without him; it just wouldn't be spring.

A chickadee follows a robin follows a blue jay for a splash in the bath. Robins, of all the bathers, like to sit for a while, squat right down past their rust colored parts and contemplate their surroundings. Luxuriating in the tub if you will. Do you suppose that this love of a good soak is why they have an oxidized breast, they've rusted?

My best Canadian friend, the dark eyed junco, is still here even at seventy degrees Fahrenheit. Proof, if proof is needed, that the comings and goings, the carousel of species is more a function of sunlight than temperature. My friends will choose their departure date based on lumens not therms. They will put up with what must be uncomfortable heat, it is just early April after all, until the light is right, until the sun's angle is just so, until precious day has finally overtaken dour night as the ruler of the season.

The juncos are last in the bath this evening and already I miss them. There will be a day this week or next when they will disappear, launching their thousand mile flight to northern climes. They'll be off somewhere to breed but will carefully mark their secret schedule, circling a day in November, to return for their winter in the 'south'.

I wonder if the cardinals will notice that the juncos are gone. They are always together the gray and the red. First out in the morning and last in at night, I think they must have the keys to the hidden roosts of all the birds. They must be the chaperones and tucker-inners, the story readers and light douers. They look good together out on the lawn, a zoot suit and formal wear hopping on the same dance floor. Lucky me to have a table right up front so I can take it all in. In my next life I will be a bird or a dancer, or maybe both.

A bluebird has joined the soiree this evening taking to the old apple tree as if it were personally upholstered for him. What a sight! That color, that off the charts color! He and his mate have taken up residence in a luxury box perfectly situated at the edge of the prairie. I know they have chosen this particular box because I watched, open mouthed, as Mr. and Mrs. B drove off a sparrow that had the temerity to nest in it for the past week or so. Let me tell you, appearances to the contrary, bluebirds take a back seat to no one when it comes to aggressively establishing their domicile. The bluebirds would not rest until the sparrow had flown well across the valley. Every time he tried returning to pick up a few things the blues let him have it again. Every time I let myself think that nature mimics a Disney movie I am reminded that a Tim Burton film is running just behind it.

And then there are daffodils. Is there any sight cheerier in all the world than a patch of yellow daffodils at the edge of the woods? They grow at our place in abundance. There is no way of telling which of them was planted by the previous owners and which have spread by their own volition. It doesn't matter of course; a daffodil is what it is and there is no place that they are out of place. It would be interesting some day to travel indeterminately by walking from one daffodil patch to the next. The method would be to stand at one patch and scan the surroundings, then march to the next patch in whatever direction and repeat. I wonder, in doing so, whether one would get somewhere or nowhere. Would you walk a great circle, never leaving the vicinity or would you trace a curvy, swervey path all the way to Sheboygan? In any case the route would be defined in daffodils. A finer path I can not imagine.

In my business life it was often pointed out to me that my outlook was somewhere past the positive side of Pollyanna, that I had a way of returning, relentlessly, to the idea that success was just one idea away. Maybe I should organize a reunion of my skeptical colleagues to show them that standing amidst bluebirds and daffodils is one definition of success. Who would argue that the resplendent rising of the season was not at the very top of life's successful outcomes? Surely no one who has stood where I stand, here, on this first day of spring's sweet return.