

california watershed 2020 - an elegy

Bluebird sky and bloody sky but rare the cotton sky, eternally rolling indomitable surf, estuary of millions of faces, anemic yet perseverant rivers and creeks, mysteriously still lakes and withered reservoirs.

An ocean tempestuous but with streamers of respite, writhing beach of infinity sand crabs, opal-flanked redbills careening in rips in low-light dawn spray, mirror silvers sidling in noontime eddies crafted by chunky stacks of sable stone, elk crooning in twilight, smoky dusk mist falling and then enshrouding all.

Mirage wasteland recovered to salty pickleweed bounty, marauding mudding bat rays basking in balmy muddy marsh-plain water seared by sun and savoring a crustacean crunch over a fishy feast, sable and snow fluttering simultaneously as infinity Willets rising from declaimed shores. Kayak Man, teasing me warmly in the searing summer sun and amid the sullen state of society.

The marsh, leaves of reeds reverberating the spring wind, singing. The sun revealing many moods, eyes closed and veiled, then glittering and glinting through diamond clouds. Myriad iridescent striped bass, seeking sanctuary in the marsh away from the weed-smothering of the Delta pelagic. Typical mellow marsh people about, grizzled white people puttering by in small aluminum V-hull boats, a laughing, tubby sista with smooth, glistening skin tossing some bait, pining for a big catfish, on Beldon's dock.

Land moist from precious rain, strips between orchards a glittering velvety green care of that rare rain, dull brown turned shimmering chocolate on exposed limbs and trunks of sagacious valley oaks ringing the swelling and swooning tidal waters, and big, boisterous, pillowing clouds riding up the Sierra, enrapturing clouds breathing a lovely dynamism into what can be static Central Valley. Then rapid evaporation to sere fields and dusty levee roads, contrasted by aquatic sylvan crystal vibrance gushing rotund, lazy largemouths, sunburst bluegill and redear sunfish, complemented by blackberry profusion along fecund sloughs, hands hue'd crimson and mauve from becoming with the gushing bounty.

Purple vetch, yellow mustard, and green grass, all flowing, all so vibrant, such blooming of springtime life, painting a lovely full-palette portrait of grassland, and all with so little time. Gorgeous, blooming carp, bright orange and red flanks and fins shading to steel backs, so powerful, each aching my arm as I danced 'em in. Brilliant Bullock's Orioles fluttering musically in early morning, and an Ash-throated Flycatcher, brilliant orange splashed through feathers, mirroring the carp below.

Amid well-tended farms of walnuts and rice paddies, the crystal, placid river wending past point bars and cut banks of its own making, old-time bottomland hardwood forest adorning its banks, pushing back to the levee brink. Flowing smoothly, whirlpool swirls in the deeper holes, riffles withered to trickles, sluggish runs. A flourish of hardhead and suckers and squaws, a rare echo of ancient time, with carp splashing in backwaters, just like they're supposed to. Stripers of two flavors - teenagers in very defined seams, eating young-of-year cypriniforms, and

big mommas, either hunting outside weedlines for teenager hardhead or hanging behind sucker pods in the trickles.

Shadowing blue and coast live-oaks and those ghostly grey pines, the lowest-elevation expression of the mystical mixed-coniferous forest. Shrunken streams and staid ponds, scummy with algae, blowing up with life, fecund and stagnant, respite and repose from the surrounding rusty, charred land. Croaking big bullfrogs and plopping little yellow-legged ones, blending in, becoming one, with the rocks they perch on, accompanied by two western pond turtle dudes duking it out over a lone lovely lady. Laughing, cheery Blue-grey Gnatcatchers endlessly gossiping. Shaggy jackrabbits followed by a dashing, sable-spotted teenage cougar in indigo twilight. A warm black man, a good hunter, deep into the woods, striving for a gobbler. A few companies of boaters, one group in a raft, another in kayaks, all seemingly happy, enlivened. Rednecks and rural *cholos* - bro-dozers, dirt bikes, automatic guns blasting - all surprisingly friendly. And a dip in Bear Creek, amid all the beautiful little California roach, all dancing in the lovely little unique creek, sides flashing mirrors as they happily peck at slimy rocks or skim sediment at creek's bottom. Wind singing through the canyon, the roach's incessant flitting and fluttering always stimulating the eye, the songs of the water-loving birds - Red-winged Blackbirds, Song Sparrows, Killdeer - complementing the wing of the wind through the grey pines and live-oaks and blue oaks. Me in an afterglow, as if I'd just made love to the little spur, that little jewel, of the Watershed.

Breathtaking jewelflowers rising from a Martian landscape, once raped but now recovered to Wild. Golden leaves of senesced, fragrant mule's ears chattering like ghostly bones in the soft autumn breeze alongside golden cottonwood leaves drifting in a low, slow creek, only ancient water now flowing, tombstone leaves linked in perfect congruence, puzzle pieces, seductively suggesting that within their form lay life's secret meaning. The eloquent gradient of rainbows to brookies, increasing in two planes, ripples to plunge pools, increasing altitude. The flow of time, finish of mayflies superseded by flourish of ants in nestled, ancient lakes eloquently captured by Nakano's omniscient rainbows. Rubied red salmon a promise of renewal to the deadened, sallow autumn grass. Gazillions of newts imperiously commandeering the wet trail along the healthy tributary, a mini-pumpkin obstacle course. Creeping vireos, melodic solitaires, and the perfection of robins reclaiming declaimed forest among many bears, lemony beasts that bolt from ya within a millisecond of detecting you, and among many deer, doe-eyed, bucks with regal crowns. An older couple billowing life energy, a man, thin, leather skin, bright eyes, goatee and friendly, and his woman, flowing white hair, smooth white skin tinged effervescent pink, also bright eyes, infinity exponents of the value of life lived outdoors. And deep in her clefts, deeply wed to pure waters, naked, water enveloping, lots of little beds smoothed out gently in soft, piney soil, down dark, dirty rutted roads, among those beautiful conifers that enrapture my soul, lodgepole and red fir singing their ancient songs in late summer's crystal breeze, an eternal song, pre-dating humanity.

Stark surrounding land - clear, cold pools to bathe in, gnarled scarps to climb and sweat from, blasted volcanic shafts arising, tinkling springs frothing with monkeyflower and camas lilies and freshness. And the bare-banked reservoir, such a banquet, rainbowed perch and turquoise crappie and speckled pumpkinseed, endless, crunching bugs and crustaceans just like the silvers and bluegills and rainbows. Matching birds above, brilliant crimson-canary tanagers,

royal buntings, maroon-streaked Yellow Warblers. Phantom reminders of failed love amid flowering of new-family love. Then water falling down, finally, sleet on windshield in a black morning, and winter's ocean bloom of wild, rose-burnished steelhead stubbornly stuck in cold, foam-lidded runs. Cathedral misty light illuminating withered sculptured stones of lives long buried, attaining eternity through incense-cedars that overlook with grateful sighs.

And here, my sweet little bastion backyard, enlivening wind swinging through domesticated dwarfed trees to stream through my window screen and caress my skin, Lesser Goldfinches and Scrub-jays pilfering my birdfeeder, House Finches twittering at my birdfeeder so much a better Twitter than that Internet crime, juncos and many-flavored sparrows exuberant in the cool, dewy-wet grass that gifts numerous Easter-like treats, wild Western Bluebirds filling my bird box with regeneration.

I feel, I watch, I listen.