

Jottings

7-4-10

Already it has happened. The hills that were Ireland green have gone a golden blond. Fields lie trimmed down with grasses drawn into rectangular building blocks and huge jelly rolls of hay dot the landscape. Soon the bundles will be drawn into barns to be parceled out to cattle and horses as the dry season draws out. The garden plants await a weekly drink and vegetable fields enjoy their daily drenching flowing from snakes of irrigation lines.



In North County the heat shimmers off the land by midday. Cows search for shade under the gnarled oak trees. People lounge in the pool while others zoom by on the freeway, blissful in refrigeration. Now the grapes are visible on the vines, the beans are sprouting, and soon even pumpkins will start to color the fields.

Roses do well in the heat. Massive bushes of them line the rows of grape vines. Not so by the coast where those that have been planted by immigrants from areas with warm summers struggle to survive in the cool, moist air. Roses, after all, are from the cactus family and more suited to desert-like climates.



Down on the coast the dense, impenetrable fog drifts up the coastal mountains painting everything in gray. Tourists decked out in shorts and tank tops run shivering into shops to buy sweatshirts. And everyone worries that fireworks will fade into the gloom.

The brief season of green is over.

Two distinct regions within 25 miles of each other, but two widely different climates. Even directly on the coast, pockets of balmy weather allow avocados and citrus to flourish.

This year the green came early to the fields thanks to the life giving rains that each year start later and later.



And so we relished romping through fields of storkbill filaree, tiny yellow dandelions, and splashy orange poppies for a time. It was even delightful to see the dreaded oxalis sprouting in the lawns in town. Miles and miles of tall, yellow mustard plants grew by the roadsides. Now the stalks sway in the warm breezes, bleached of color, awaiting the blades of the mowing machines to knock them down to make the countryside safe from wildfire.

The small birds that were so busy just weeks ago nesting and raising young have already pushed their offspring out of the house and are settling back into small flocks that spend the early hours of the day searching for insects in the roadside scrub. The cats are eager to go out and join them, not for insect searching, but to sneak around and stalk trying for a catch. One must keep a watch at the window to yell at them should they get too close. "No birds!" There are unsuspecting gophers that need routing, but are not as enticing as the sparrow and the finches.

Four fat pigeons sit up on the wires and mourning doves join them, but not too close. All of them assess the birdfeeder on the balcony below. Is it filled with seed today? The doves are welcome, but one could do without the pigeons. Why don't they try New York?



Down on the waterfront the bay is calm in the morning and might stay that way all day now that the winds of spring have gone to rest for another year. But without the wind the marine layer hangs down and fog drifts back and forth across the water.

The sea and sky blend together into one great mass of grayness. The only splash of color comes from the red and green buoys in the channel. Boats head out for a day of fishing or whale watching. Tourists wake, and begin strolling the waterfront in search of breakfast. Shopkeepers open their doors.

It is finally summer on the coast of California.