

## NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Faraway lands beckoned, meandering country roads, fields bedazzled with sunshine, sprinkled with nodding heads of blackeyed Susans, demure white-capped daisies, tall grass surrendering to insistent breezes.

I'm heading north on Route 28 in the verdant Catskill Mountains in upstate New York, open to adventure, my gaze sweeping the countryside, right and left, poised for capturing scenes that with time become faded memories.

The distant hills? Curve upon curve, like a reclining femme fatale in diaphanous blue....

Mauve-tinted mallow...pale blue chicory...golden Alexander, of a rapturous green, awaiting one more ardent kiss of the sun to burst into exuberant golden bloom to lavish the countryside.

I know the names because I stopped by at a tiny nursery, driving up on Route 10 North as I veered off 28. The nursery man was ever so helpful, looking up the pictures in his wild flower book.

I was the student, he the teacher.

"You have to go by the leaves, you know," he advised.

It always amazes me, the ready goodness in people.

I thanked him profusely and bought some of his products: juicy plums, a jar of mango jam, and local Harpersfield cheese which, according to their brochure, is "aged naturally and crafted by using milk from our cow dairy...." Speckled with the red and green of tomato and basil, spicy and pungent, it is a type of Tilsit, which originally comes from East Prussia.

The brochure further states: "Our cows graze on pastures, the air and water are clean, and our cheese is true to the tradition of a European setting with an American spirit." Nothing is rushed, each step in the balanced, carefully overseen process is an art form, waited out to its full development.

Under their logo:

"May simple pleasures fill you with joy." John 15:11

And they continue to do so. Next stop along the way is a tiny, well-organized outdoor antique show, offered by St. James Church in Delhi. I lunch there on chili and crackers for all of \$1.50, purchase an old book on flower remedies, then listen to an organ recital in the cool of their stone-walled chapel.

Browsing under the tents later I overhear a man proclaim himself to be a "mountain-man", and his daughter a "saloon-girl". He has a long white beard, and an old cap plopped carelessly upon his head.

Just as I'm about to wonder how he can talk about his own daughter that way, I realize: he and his whole family are re-enactors.

I move on. More of the wide-open vastness beckons, and a profusion of trees everywhere, upright, keeping their composure, except for an occasional breeze that fans them, revealing the leaves' silvery underside.

Is there a scene more peaceful, more docile than cows grazing in pastureland?

My car glides by, hugging the road in eternal friendship, past upturned parasols of Queen Anne's Lace, a myriad of them.

Quizzically, I read a sign: Dry Brook—What happens when torrential rains come and fill up the brook? Do they change the sign?

One wonders about these things driving around in the countryside.

Unfortunately, I will miss the July 22 horseshoe festival, so fervently advertised for miles around, in Hobart, which, the sign proclaims, is the "Jewel of the Western Branch". Don't ask.

A horse, a beautiful chestnut, gallops up to the embankment of the road, stops, and looks straight at me, dark, melancholy eyes burying into mine. We connect.

Stillness. I hold my breath.

Sometimes it seems to me horses are trying to tell us something, to relay a message. Something that perhaps we humans are not aware of, not yet.

I so wish I could hop on his back (with a little help) and sprint up onto curvy mountain roads with him. But, I curb my eagerness: Didn't they used to hang horse-thieves?

So, instead, I pick more flowers, wild and tame, the latter, masses of white hydrangea, hanging invitingly over a black wrought iron fence. Very low on the sin-scale of guilty pleasures, so miniscule, in fact, that God just winks at me for it.

I do believe when God created flowers they took His own breath away.

Reversed longing sets in out of nowhere. Yearning for vast open spaces turns into a need to drive down scenic Route 77, taking me into the town of Guilford, where everything over the past few years, has become comfortably familiar—home.

My need for change of scenery satiated, I begin to miss my own state, our very own nurseries, our own delicate Queen Anne's Lace and blazing tiger lilies, our backyard estate sales, our own roadside lemonade stands, and finally my little porch with the hanging purple and blue lantana, which I'm sure needs a good soaking by now. I am ready to depart, to head south again.

Clicking the heels together of my imaginary ruby red slippers, I head speedily down south of I 87—getting home just in time to hear smooth New Orleans jazz on a languid summer afternoon, then to view stars explode above generously leafed tree tops from my window on the Guilford Green—and to have lace-edged dreams to the humming of a window fan.

P.S. When I got home I checked out the meaning of a horse suddenly appearing in one's life in *Animal Wisdom* by Susie Green. Here is a quote:

"Horse is Pegasus returned to Gaia, the earth—as he trots and gallops for a moment his four hooves leave the soil, poised for flight, but he returns to earth so that humankind may continue to partake of his wisdom....Those whom Horse has chosen to guide will find their spirits and bodies set free in the magic of dance, and their whole

sense of being transformed...Drink deeply of the knowledge that only a lifetime of living can bring.”

ZsuZsa Simandy