

Name

# One Humid Night

## by Andy Landis

Sometimes, I move through nature while doing my daily chores, thinking, planning, not really seeing the beauty and wonder around me. Other times when I see nature, I observe it like a cat watching a bird at the kitchen window, tail twitching, jaw clinched, eyes focused, completely absorbed in the seeing. Whenever I allow myself to be taken in this way, I am changed. And usually for the better. Like last week on St. Simons Island, Georgia.

It had been hot that day, really hot, with sweltering amounts of humidity. Walking along the water’s edge, I talked to God and a lone seagull, taking note that neither of them talked much to me in return. The humidity was nearly suffocating. This detail didn’t stop me from walking or talking, however, because I am a transplanted Yankee. My motto is: Northern by chance, Southern by choice. This being my mantra, I don’t allow myself the privilege of complaining about the humidity, the bugs, or the accents. In fact, I can talk as southern as the next belle when push comes to shove. But I digress. Where was I? Ah, yes. The humidity.

The humidity was thick and stifling as I trudged along. I never so wanted to develop gills in my life which made me think of evolution and that if evolution were true and I had evolved from a fish, why hadn’t I kept those darn gills? Even evolution couldn’t explain this humidity, I decided.

Dolphins swam past the pier and I longed to be one of them, splashing and diving in the warm Atlantic waters. I’d rather be one of them instead of being me, wheezing with each laborious step as I crossed the hot sand. Those dolphins weren’t heaving and panting. No, they were laughing, I was certain, at me talking out loud to seagulls, to God, and to myself as I scorched my feet limping from one end of the beach to the other so that I could say I’d been walking along the beach. And we’re convinced the smarter of the creatures.

Later that night, after a long shower and some light beating, I chose to eat a small restaurant by a parking lot that overlooks the pier. I decided on this particular place because it offers seating outside on the porch. Inside, the restaurant was too cold for me because the air conditioner had been on high all day long. Maybe the owner thought December temperatures indoors would give grouchy tourists a bigger appetite when they escaped the heat. I, however, chose a wooden table on the outside deck and opened my notebook after ordering dinner. There I pulled my legs up under me and took note of oncoming night.

The air was full of sights, sounds and smells. There were flowering plants in bloom, crickets humming and cicadas singing as a gentle, quiet rain began to fall. I wrote, then listened and looked, and wrote some more. Suddenly, thunder rumbled in the distance. I looked up from my writing to see a lightening strike swipe the sky in a glorious pattern, the kind you can only see a split second after your eyes behold it. Umbrellas shot up across the parking lot and mothers called for their children, “run to the car, watch where you are going, hurry up…” and the like. People raced to their cars so they could scurry back to their hotels and watch TV instead of being in a summer storm. I, however, wanted to stay and watch the storm move across the ocean from the relative safety of my deck, where the smell of wet wood filled my nostrils and where a smattering of rain could splash across my face. I thought of my husband and how he would tell me I live dangerously and that I should go inside. He wasn’t there to insist so I hunkered down all the more and smiled at myself.

Thunder crashed. My focus narrowed. I searched the sky for the hot white streaks of light as they came sooner and sooner after each clap of thunder rolling and roaring in the heavens. Rain-gorged clouds were colliding in the dark night high above me. I couldn’t see it happening but I could hear and see the evidence. The evidence was the thunderous explosions of sound and the splitting of the black night with swords and scissors of light that cut the sky like a lioness cutting the flesh of her prey.

And the rains fell. Large, full balls of water were hurled to the ground with passionate force. Soon there was no one left on the deck but me, a young couple taking cover, and my waiter who had given up on collecting the money from the check he’d left at my table.

Excitement overtook me as the storm shook and soaked me, mesmerized and beckoned me. Streaks of white so bright they blinded me pierced the ocean waters. Thunder came simultaneously with the lightening and the false lights of the restaurant flickered with each strike. Tiny waves of fear (or was it joy?) filled my gut but I told myself to stay, stay and see, this display of power all around me.

So I did. For three hours I watched and listened, not only to what was going on around me but what was going on within me, too.  Storms within and without. Storms of enormous proportions. Storms of grief and sorrow, anger and fear. Storms of weeping and wailing and regret and power. Storms of hearing and healing and seeing and guilt. Storms. Powerful, air cleansing storms.

I couldn’t move until it was over.

Only then, in the gentle drizzle, could I saunter back to my hotel, both exhausted and invigorated. As I walked, tears seeped from my eyes as I realized nature had, indeed, taught me something very important that day. When I think I can’t breathe, when I feel the heat is too much, when I don’t want to be me anymore but would rather be anyone or anything else but me – I need to stop, look and listen. Listen to myself. Listen to the thunder inside and look for the streaks of light within me. I learned that if I take the time to wait and watch and watch and listen to the storm inside me I may find, within the turmoil, power there. Power that seizes me, shakes me up, and changes me. Forever.

And something else, too. Rain and tears, when they are mixed together, are hard to tell apart. “These aren’t tears,” I said to the innkeeper as I walked past her to my room “These are big, luscious, sopping droplets of rain from the storm outside. Did you hear and see it? Oh, it was glorious.”

As I slowly walked up the steps in my room, I knew how grateful I was to have seen, really seen, the storm. That night I had trusted nature to have something to say to me because she had and I was blessed. I noticed how clean I felt. I’d been washed and refreshed by the cleansing power of a really big storm.

Humidity and storms go together, hand in hand, like joy and pain, laughter and tears, dolphin and seawater, you and me. We’re all in this together. I know you know this so I am just reminding you but if you’re in a storm, find a table, take out a notebook, and watch and listen. All storms, even really big storms, will pass and sooner or later they will leave a clean swathe of peace after they do.

They really do. Just wait and keep watching. You’ll see.