



SEPTEMBER

Why begin in September? My life till I retired was structured by the school year, shaped by intellectual work from fall till spring. Also, September was the month that gave us Elisabeth, the start of my happy career as a father. September seems a natural beginning for a new project.

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Yesterday afternoon as I walked back from the cottage I saw that the dragonflies are back. They've been gone for the last three weeks. Some lazed in the warm, hard-packed sand of the road crossing the bog, others flitted ten or twelve yards over my head, their huge eyes searching for and finding flying insects. Not mosquitoes. Even at the wettest times there are few mosquitoes here by the bog. In spring, when mosquito larvae would hatch in the warming water, the bog is filled with frogs, whose preferred delicacy is, precisely, mosquitoes in their larval stage. Yesterday the dragonflies were enjoying an unusual September hatch of some other insect, a high-flying species.

I walk this road, our packed-dirt driveway, most days around ten-thirty in the morning. From the house, the road crosses the bog, passes my studio, and ends at the macadam of Chernoff Drive. If I don't stop somewhere along the two hundred yards to the studio, I can get there in about four minutes. My daily commute.

The transition between house and work, however, usually lasts longer. I take breaks along the way, to examine and reflect on

overnight shifts. Most often these are tiny, a couple of little pink flowers I'd not noticed before, deer hoofprints in the middle of the road where the dirt is looser, the narrow grove of little alder trees just a few months old, a new brown rut in the hard-packed dirt. At times my breaks are longer, as when the Pacific crabapple buds have overnight sprung to life in a veil of tiny white blossoms, or in winter, when the two inches of rain over the previous two days have raised the bog level to within a half-inch of the road's edge and the potholes have dropped below the waterline, or a heavy winter storm here at the highest point on the island has downloaded twelve inches of wet snow, flattened every hardhack bush, and left us snowbound, unable to drive out, forcing cross-country skis or high gumboots on us if we are to cross the bog.

Yesterday it was the dragonflies, two and a half inches long with a wingspan of three, their bodies a deep, iridescent blue. Dozens of them. Whether their appetite was aroused thanks to some invisible sign that a flurry of savoury insects has just hatched or they've somehow been directed here by a scout of their own, I have no idea. That they have arrived is enough. They're here for one purpose only: for me to admire. Admiring life along the drive is part of my bog tending, a kind of mulling.

The bog is on an island, Gabriola, off the east coast of Vancouver Island. Kit and I have lived here more than ten years. Prior to that we'd enjoyed three years coming to Gabriola for several months, winter and spring. To get to the island from the mainland we take the car ferry from Vancouver to Nanaimo, on Vancouver Island, then another ferry from Nanaimo to Gabriola. I like to think of these transitions as moving from a larger geography to an increasingly smaller one: if we've been away on a long trip we can fly into Vancouver International from anywhere in the world, pick up our car, head down to the big ferry at the terminal in Tsawwassen, a vessel capable of carrying more than a thousand vehicles, two hours later disembark on

Vancouver Island, the Big Island, drive up to the small city of Nanaimo, onto our little ferry the *Quinsam*, with a seventy-car capacity, after a twenty-minute crossing drive off onto petite Gabriola (about the size and shape of Manhattan Island, but with a population of four thousand), head along South Road, leaving behind an equal number of cars that have chosen North Road, our fellow ferry-crossers dropping away a few at a time, then we, too, quit that main artery and head up the hill along a less-travelled road, finally onto Chernoff, a short, wooded street, then turn onto our driveway, down the slope, past the cottage, across the bog, and up an incline to the house. From the great world out there to our refuge here. And, on the other side of the house, far below, False Narrows, the shining Pylades Channel, and beyond it Trincomali Channel, branches of Georgia Strait, home to three dozen dark-wooded islands, the closest being Mudge, Link, DeCoursey, Ruxton, and Thetis. A grand vista.