

The Colored Hills

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In time to a steady drumming of thunder a grey host of rain clouds marched steadily across the sky. A light breeze sprang up, fanning a delightful coolness into the air.

"Let's go for a short walk, anyway," Kathryn said, glancing at the restless sky. "A bit of rain won't hurt us."

Full of enthusiasm, we left the yard. We crossed a piece of shortly-cropped pasture and entered a meadow of shoulder-high slough grass. Bright green, and topped with heavy seed plumes, the grass throbbed to the gentle crooning of the wind. On a nearby pond a pair of coots bobbed erratically over the water. Their dark forms blending with the cloud-shadowed water, they seemed to be living symbols of the approaching storm.

Our path climbed from the meadowland to a low ridge. We turned for a moment. The hayfield we had just left looked like a huge carpet subtly tinted and patterned with the varying greens of different varieties of grasses. In the background rose the rolling contours of a field cloaked in the purple of countless alfalfa blossoms.

We walked on, stopping to pick a sample of fleabane daisies and a few early asters. In a small pothole was found a large clump of Arrowhead. A cluster of their graceful leaves and a spray of their pretty white flowers joined our growing bouquet of wild flowers.

We topped another rise and another meadow spread below us, green with the lush growth of timothy and redtop and ornamented at the far end with a golden wealth of sweet clover. From the south, sweeping down to the grassland, tumbled the dark green slopes of bush-covered hills. Marking the boundaries of woods and meadow, a glowing red ribbon of fireweed painted its bright message that from the ashes of an old life, a new life can be created. On the north side, a series of open sidehills blushed prettily with Indian paint brush in full bloom.

From a distance the Indian paint brush offered a general rose coloring, but on closer inspection a vast range of soft colors could be picked out. We revelled in the many shades of pink and rose. Occasionally, there were clumps of beautiful cerise and clusters of salmon. Much rarer were white flowers and one plant was found with green heads tipped with flecks of maroon.

The muttering of the thunder had grown into a great bass voice pouring out an ample warning of the coming rain. Birds and other wildlife had apparently taken its heeding early for our glimpses of Nature's folk were very scarce. Reluctantly we arced gradually for home.

Our short Sunday walk was at an end. As we entered the house and the first drops of rain began their liquid tattoo on the roof, we shared a thought in common. Nature is of God's creation and in respecting and admiring her — His handicraft, surely we gain knowledge of the Artist, himself.

FEATHERED NEIGHBORS

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Often the hawks will seem to fly for the sheer delight of flying. The pair climb high into the air together and glide down, wings motionless.

As I write this I can see a Barn Swallow flying near the male hawk. The swallow is just daring him to come near its nest. They circle, climbing higher and higher, until they are almost out of sight. Suddenly, the hawk darts toward the earth, the swallow close behind. Soon they separate and each flies its own way. The hawk zooms low over the windbreak and a Kingbird, uttering its alarm note, darts frantically at the Sparrow Hawk. The hawk flies higher and the Kingbird goes back to its nest.

Soon the three young birds will be big enough to band and then it won't be long until we see them flying with their parents.

We hope the Sparrow Hawks will return again next year and raise another family in one of our nest boxes.