

Silent Summer

by Jack Swenson

It's eerie. There are no birds. My friend and I take our morning walk in a bubble of silence. At one time the business park was an aviary. The dot.com folks came and went; the wild life flourished.

Now, nothing. This morning, a few geese. Lost, I figured. Or tired. Taking a break before continuing the journey north.

Bert and I plod along the trail on the bank of a stream. We stop on a bridge over the water and look down. The water is pea soup green. Dead. In shallow spots water devoid of life ripples over mossy stones.

Bert says they sprayed and killed the bugs. There's nothing for the birds to eat. It's true; there are no bugs either. There never were any bugs, I say. This is California. You see any butterflies around, he asks? There used to be butterflies. We still got ants, I say. Yes, he concedes.

I tell him my brother-in-law claims a third of the particulates in the air come from China. Maybe it's that. He says it's developers. They're building another dike out from shore in the bay. Ten years from now there'll be houses on it.

Maybe it's the ozone layer I say. Naw, he says. That don't bother the bugs. How do you know, I ask?

I point to the contrails coming off a military jet high above our heads. Those suckers use a lot of fuel, I point out.

I sigh. Well, if it's the city council responsible for it, we'll never find out about it. I bet that's it though. They sprayed for mosquitoes and overdid it.

They don't spray for mosquitoes out here, Bert says. They do in Minnesota, I say. Yah, well this ain't Minnesota, Bert says.

We finish our walk and go our separate ways. He drives home in his GMC truck, and I head for WalMart in my Toyota Tacoma.

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