

HOW WE SPEND OUR DAYS

An excerpt from *Joy Is the Justice We Give Ourselves*

BY J. DREW LANHAM

THIS DAY IS THOSE DAYS WHICH ARE these days of many-hued leaves leaving. These are the days the wind comes in and rattles fall's cage, stripping the maples and poplars nude of saffron and scarlet but leaving them wrinkled, soiled clothes on beeches and oaks. These are the days of white-throated sparrows arriving in the back yard to sing of old Sam Peabody's poverty-stricken Canadian times. These are the days of deer chasing, of bucks' antler rubbing, of does' white tails lifting, of future fawn-making, the convergent intersected result. These are the days of me wishing I was watching them ghost through at dawn. Of me wishing I was waiting until dusk for them to reappear. Of me wishing I was above it all, voyeuring into wood's lust. These are the days of the beaver moon hiding behind earth's shadow. Me getting out of a warm bed at 2 a.m. to see it turn a pinker shade of pale. It is the day of me howling to myself.

This is the day that becomes the days of stress coming, expectation swelling, perfection failing. Familial ailing. Holidays. These are the days of true friend revelations. These are the days of double-dose vaxxing. Boosting. Hoping that odd coughs are just coughs. These are the days of

still masking. These are the days of wondering why Black lives don't matter beyond marches or unarmed Negroes dying. These are indeed the times that try our souls—one day of despairing multiplied into too many and knowing that justice is an ephemeral thing lain at the intersection of *juris prudence* and luck of the jury drawn.

These are the days of the very last leftover katydid half-humming. These are the days of witnessing black birds gathering. Flocking. Peppering bruised purple evening sky. Feathered barometers as accurate as the meteorological coin flip. These are the days of autumn becoming winter before winter is official. These are the days of winter wrens in woodpiles chattering, not caring whether it is winter or not. These are the days of kinglets ruling over thickets with ruby and golden crowns. These are the days of first frost. Of sapsuckers mewing like arboreal cats. These are the days of cuddling a real cat. A tabby cat. A purring tabby cat that trusts my lap for a few moments of napping. This is the day I envy feline relaxation technique. This is the day to be a copycat.

These are the days when Christmas moves to the front of the hyper-capitalistic line and any



other holiday gets bumped out of mind. These are days the once tender summer green gets bit by below-32 degrees and curled to crispy brown. These are the days of second and then third cup coffee-ing. These are the days of cardinals being redbirds. Juncos being snowbirds. Flickers being yellowhammers. Vultures being buzzards. These are the days of flip flops, chilly toes, and fleece vests for warming. These are the days of ashy ankles needing more lotion. This is the day I don't care about what I look like. These are the days that the mustard greens get bitter and taste best. The days of rutabaga bottoms mashed to a pulp and boiled purple top turnips with butter. These are the days of deep-fried turkeys and cornbread dressing (never ever ever *stuffing*). These are the days of sweet potato pie (punkins are for jack-o-lanterns and for fake coffee flavorings). This is not the day to visit the scale.

These are the kitty-corner days. The nearby faraway days. The days of converting celsius to fahrenheit and back. Why, because zero isn't always zero and thirty-two can be hot as hell. These are the days of ellipses and words never written but thought. These are the days between warblers and waterfowl, between butterbutt yellow rumps in the myrtle bush and butterball buffleheads on the farm pond. These are the days of doing downward-facing dog with the non-napping cat alongside. This is the day I thought of tadpoles in puddles as commas which made me pause as a boy. Still do as a man. These are the days

of goldenrod the color of sun. Of sumac red as blood. These are the mellow days of minor chord wringing tears from my head. These are the days of chipmunk hoarding scurry. These are the days of take your time, but hurry—'cause there's not enough time.

These are the days when slop fat pigs used to wonder how long it would be before the cold day came and it was the end of their time. That the sharp knife and the heavy ax and the boiling vat would come callin'. These are the days when November thinks of retiring. These are the days, all wrapped into one. This is a day in my mind. A day in the life. What date you ask? Yesterday or today. Or maybe tomorrow. I can't remember now. Each present has become yesterday way too fast. Tomorrow is today already. This day past tense to that. All of this swirls before I wake or in a dream or between yoga mat and shower and first call from someone wanting something I procrastinated doing. This is a day of another Zoom. There is something due this day, I'm pretty sure. Perhaps it is what you read now. Perhaps not. Here it is, anyway, for your perusal. This day is singularly plural. This is the day I dared write down what one day of musing might be like. The day I thought about who, what, where, and when brings peace to my life and who, what, where, and when shreds my life to pieces. This is the day of a single sigh, an extended exhale. Hoping to take in another, so as to keep the stream of consciousness flowing. 🍷

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