



Editor's Note: The following essay was adapted from a shorter piece I published on my blog last month. It's very different from the original.

"One of the strange things about living in the world is that it is only now and then one is quite sure one is going to live forever and ever and ever. One knows it sometimes when one gets up at the tender solemn dawn-time and goes out and stands and throws one's head far back and looks up and up and watches the pale sky slowly changing and flushing and marvelous unknown things happening until the East almost makes one cry out and one's heart stands still at the strange unchanging majesty of the rising of the sun – which has been happening every morning for thousands and thousands and thousands of years. One knows it then for a moment or so."

Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Secret Garden*

One morning in early March, I skipped the Y and took a brisk walk through the neighborhood, instead. It was one of those radically gorgeous days that practically command your attention. They came early this year, those days. A curiously wintry winter bowed to a strangely premature

spring. Remember?

As I cut a swath through my winsome, wonderfully *weird* little neighborhood – Pigeon Point is like nowhere else on earth – I marveled, like I do every year, at the outrageous profusion of blooming foliage that had sprung up, practically overnight. The camellias were just going crazy, along with those pink cotton-candy trees that line the park. (What *are* those, anyway?) The mysterious garden tucked away behind a crumbly brick wall at the end of my street – gray and forlorn just a week earlier – was now bursting with color. I smiled to myself; I had finally talked my daughter into reading one of my favorite childhood books, *The Secret Garden*, and suddenly, here it was before me. The real thing. I couldn't wait to bring her over for a glimpse.

Seriously, the beauty of the neighborhood was staggering that morning... and I knew that, as the days grew longer, it would only get better. As I walked along, I could almost see the dogwoods blooming in slow motion, the wisteria materializing from vapor, the azaleas willing their bright blossoms into the world...

But then I turned onto Park Street, and I saw *them*. The trees. Like a hideous monster invading a sweet dream, the carnage shook me from my reverie. SCE&G had been “trimming” trees in our neighborhood – something they do every five years, to accommodate the power lines – and so far, Park Street had gotten the worst of it. That's because Park Street has some of the *best* trees – an impressive strand of gargantuan, wide-sprawling live oaks. These majestic beauties had been mangled but good – scooped out, gutted – and now looked like gnarly old women doing splits upside-down, their remaining limbs awkwardly straddling the power lines. In a few fell swoops by men on machines in hardhats, these centuries-old oaks had gone from

spectacular to spread-eagle. It was borderline grotesque. I walk a lot, so I'd seen this transformation already... but it never ceased to shock me, casting a pall over my mood.

I'm not what you'd call a tree hugger – just somebody who likes trees, like everybody else – and I wasn't gearing up for a protest, exactly. (I knew SCE&G had had a job to do, and an important one.) But I couldn't help wondering if those trees on Park Street had really needed such extreme surgery? Was there not a better way? If so, why hadn't it been employed? Too difficult? Too costly? At whom should one rail about this, were one so inclined?

As I hoofed on down the road, feeling angsty now, and pondering those weighty questions, I rounded a bend onto Darby Street... and stopped in my tracks. There before me, like a gang of chatty housewives off to market, was a gaggle of geese crossing the road. They turned to look at me – there must have been 8 or 10 of them – then immediately broke into a mad, squawking dash toward a thicket of bushes in the next yard. What a sight! Granted, this neighborhood has never quite stopped being the forest it once was. We have slews of birds and raccoons and squirrels, and in summer, hardly a day goes by without my warrior-kitty Arthur bringing a garden snake in through the cat door. But this was the first gaggle of geese that had ever crossed my path in Pigeon Point. Or anywhere, for that matter. Suddenly, I felt like laughing. And in fact, I did.

Take that, SCE&G! Cut back our trees, if you must. We've still got our geese!

On the Nature of Nature

Written by Margaret Evans

It was a reality check, of sorts. The live oaks on Park Street would re-grow their branches. That's what live oaks do. And they'd still be standing on Park Street – splendid and proud – when my family, my neighbors, and the guys on machines in hardhats were long gone.

It's a funny thing, this dance we humans do with Nature. We need it more than it needs us – are at its mercy, not vice versa – and yet, we pretend otherwise. We convince ourselves we're in control. We plant our gardens and build our walls, trim our trees and watch our weather reports. We make plans and expect them to unfold just so, despite curiously wintry winters and strangely premature springs. We like believing we're masters of the universe. But really, aren't we more like that gaggle of geese, just lucky to make it across the road?

In the weeks since I took that walk, Mother Nature has asserted her authority time and time again, reminding me – in no uncertain terms – who's boss. After a month of warm, lovely weather, she sent a solid week of cold, heartless rain, dashing the Spring Break dreams of school children throughout Beaufort County... including mine. (She even kicked it off with a freak hailstorm!) On a far darker note, she casually stretched and shifted her weight beneath the island of Japan, wreaking devastation we could scarcely fathom, even as we watched it unfold on our TV sets. As hurricane season approaches, we coast dwellers can't help feeling a bit uneasy. After all, it's been a while. They say we're due up. Will this be our year? Who knows? Mother Nature is a fickle mistress.

Except when she's not. Except when she's absolutely, positively, 100 % predictable. I was right about the beauty thing, wasn't I? The Lowcountry, in April, is even more heart-stoppingly exquisite than it was in early March. It always is. You can count on it. I *do* count on it.

On the Nature of Nature

Written by Margaret Evans

But I count on this, too: Just as spring comes 'round each year, so does Easter, reminding me that, in the end, I am not bound by Nature – neither her relentless, unchanging cycles, nor her capricious, destructive whims. As unlikely as it may seem – and oh, does it ever seem unlikely, sometimes! – I'm part of all that, but beyond it, too. My spirit is free. Transcendent. Just like those waddling, ridiculous geese, this clumsy creature was built for flight.

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