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Golden Dewdrop

Duranta repens

A gardener does not grow from seed, shoot, bulb, rhizome, or cutting, but from experience, surroundings, and natural conditions.

—Karel Capek, *The Gardener's Year*

It's 7:00 A.M. and still dark outside. October in Florida doesn't arrive in full color with frosty cold snaps, but the feel of night well into morning is one sure sign of the changing seasons. I know this darkness sits on the edge of dawn, but it seems awfully late for it to be hanging around.

Not that I mind: light or dark, early morning is the best time of day for me. I've been up since five, have done some writing, and have been to the gym. No, I'm not a morning maniac. I just know how my mind and body rhythms work, and I try to use that knowledge to my benefit. As the day moves on, my energy and enthusiasm for even my favorite kind of work begin to fade. Best to start early and pack as much into the hours before noon as I can.

I go into my garden at all times of day, even when “mad dogs and Englishmen” are the only ones who might see me there. One reason I garden, in fact, is that it gives me an excuse to leave the house, breathe fresh air, and be out in the natural world. So I have a tendency to go to the garden off and on throughout the day and evening, hot or cold, rainy or clear.

Each time of day paints a different picture in the garden. From barely dawn to morning mist; from pastel pink and gold daybreak skies to sun-dance glitter on dewdrops to bright mid-day’s short, sharp shadows on the lawn; from hazy afternoon stillness to the cool breath of sunset; from twilight to dark—the garden is an ever-changing work of art.

Even so, I like being outdoors at first light best of all. Ghostly shapes take on solid forms, and faded leaves and flowers resolve themselves into focus. Whites and other pastel shades perform this negative-to-positive transformation first and most distinctly. The pale, lavender-flowered shrub *datuna*, or “golden dewdrop,” comes shimmering into view before many of its darker-hued neighbors, greeting the dawn with its spindly, skyward-reaching branches.

Two golden dewdrop bushes crouch down among some tall white “Natchez” crape myrtles that line the curb along one side of my garden. When the golden dewdrops are blooming, delicate sprays of pale violet, bee-attracting blossoms dangle from the end of each branch. The woody shrub gets its common name from the gold berries that form after the small white-edged flowers have bloomed and fallen away. Because of its name, I associate the plant with my favorite time of day: the golden hour of dawn, when most living things are still asleep and those of us who are afoot can be alone in the coolness and silence of daybreak.

The golden dewdrop is not the first flower to awaken in the morning, but its name draws us into the gardener’s day. When the dew lies on the lawn and the light is barely enough to see by,

I go to the garden alone. As often as not, the music of that old hymn comes to mind, and I pray.

*I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear,
Falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.
And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.*

—C. Austin Miles

I don't claim to hear God's voice in my ear, but I do believe that when I pray, God hears my voice and sends His Spirit to inspire, counsel, and direct me. I know that when I begin my day in prayer, especially if that prayer is connected to some creative act like writing in my journal or working in my garden, God fulfills His promise to "hear my voice."

One psalmist wrote, "In the morning, O LORD, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Psalm 5:3). When I'm out in the garden, whether sitting on a bench with a cup of coffee, writing in my journal—which is one way I lay my requests before God—or down on my knees weeding, I feel a kinship with the writer of that psalm. I know what made him choose those words: it's the sense that in the morning you're as close to God as you can get.

Think about it. How bold it is to presume that God is waiting for us to speak to Him, to lay our requests before Him, and to wait in expectation while He fulfills them! Yet when we put ourselves into a setting that's as close to God's original design for us as we can get in this world—in a garden—we are emboldened. We do feel a kinship and intimacy with God that's hard to come by in the rush and busyness of the rest of the day. And

that intimacy allows us to listen more keenly and to speak more courageously the longings and concerns of our hearts.

Author and theologian Franky Schaeffer has written a great deal about how using our artistic talents is a calling to make the world a more beautiful place while developing ourselves as spiritual beings. “What can be more spiritual,” he writes, “in this sad and often ugly world than the creation of beauty?” He goes on: “True spirituality is . . . effecting change in the real world, not hiding behind religious experience.”¹ Our duty, then, as artists who have a love for gardening, is to cultivate that gift and, in doing so, to engage in the creation of beauty in “this sad and often ugly world.”

The earth is the gardener’s canvas, and the arrangement, care, and cultivation of all the elements in the garden constitute the gardener’s medium, the gardener’s art form. All art begins with inspiration, the breathing in of ideas, visions, and energy from the Spirit of God, who is the Master Creator of the universe. When we “come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses,” we start our day in quiet and meditative expectation. We offer our talents and present our willingness to engage in this hard but satisfying work. Then we wait in expectation for that inspiration, not only for how we should garden but also for how we should live. As co-creators with God, we can rest assured that the inspiration will come.

So let’s begin before the sunrise, with the golden dewdrop, lovely lady of the morning, reminding us that each day brings with it a new opportunity to give voice to our hopes and to wait in expectation for the God of all creation to reply.