

A Most Gracious Host

It was a hot, overcast day in mid-July, and as is typical for the time of year, Stone Harbor was buzzing with summer visitors pushing strollers, jogging, and riding bicycles. My husband and I pulled up to the Bird Sanctuary on our way home from a leisurely ride through the island, when a gray catbird greeted us at the entrance, the dark tuft atop his head appeared as though it had been freshly groomed.

We stopped to admire a small cluster of lacy white mountain mint, vibrant butterfly weed, and yellow-orange coreopsis that seemed to be happy for the opportunity to show off their new summer outfits.

The catbird, impatient with our dallying, hopped from fallen limb to withered tree stump, and beckoned us to enter. He led us down a sandy, well-worn path, pausing just long enough for us to notice a grouping of prickly lavender bull thistle and swirled yellow mullein.

We continued to follow him, tramping along the trail, until we came to a small clearing in the thicket. There, weathered benches, bearing the names of nature lovers who delighted in their time spent in this peaceful sanctuary before us, provided a place for weary visitors to rest amid fragrant eastern red cedar, hearty viburnum, and a plush understory of blackberry bushes. We sat for a moment in the cool shade and listened to the various bird calls competing for our attention.

Our feathered tour guide became distracted when a friend of his hopped over for a quick chat before they both took off into one of the tall trees. Was the tour over? That was fine if it was, as there were things to distract us as well, a mysterious rustle here, a glimpse of something shadowy there. He did a great job making us feel welcome, and we appreciated his hospitality.

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