

# Warm Falls the Night Over Muskrat Landing

*Written and submitted by Clara M. Hodges*



The moon was already high, in a still blue sky and it was only 7:45 PM. It was a three-quarter moon destined to full in a couple of days. The evening was warm with only a whisper of a breeze.

Walking through the marsh on the slatted boardwalk I could smell the almost sweet scented breaths of the bulrushes radiating from the depths; now covered with the tide. Under the pier there were strange little splashes and sounds of scurrying in the rushes—small minnows or fiddler crabs frightened by my walking.

I noticed the lack of biting insects which can be almost devastating this time of the year.

Nearing the end of the 200 foot pier I could see where the tide, just an hour ago, had covered the small dock—the boards now being dark and damp.

The tide was falling fast, though with the absence of wind, the mirrored waters moved swiftly, yet not distorting the images cast near the shore directly across from the pier.

The pale moon smiled its reflection into the dark creek water. Its image on the water was clear and perfect for a while then a few seconds later it became scrambled into a jigsaw puzzle only to be brought back together again.

A water skimmer skittered by on the surface; its tiny fast moving legs left ripples causing the image of the moon to be as a burning flame with sparkles shooting forth in every direction.

Then, as before, it all passed and the pale three-quarter full moon mirrored itself once again in the dark water.

As the tide receded, the rushes on the point, moved from underneath as though they were being waved back and forth by a small vibrating motor. Eddies popped up here and there showing the swiftness of the current lying below. Small fish jumped playfully from their surface patterned trails. Larger fish, swimming deeper, left a v-shaped wake as they went with the tide. I was curious as to their kinds, but will believe them to be small mullets since at a distance, I saw a silver streak jump from the water, falling back, as forceful as a high diver, leaving a splash. The expanded ripples moved outward further and further until they were no more.

From the cove, down-stream, I saw a small head out in the water. Something was swimming rapidly from cove to point, leaving quite a large rippled trail. It could have been a water snake but most likely a muskrat taking a late evening swim in the out-going tide.

The evening air was filled with the sounds of birds. The red-winged black bird, the screech of the marsh hen, a warbler, the shrill cry of the night hawk swooping back and forth high above, and far away in the woods the whip-poor-will could be heard as it made its evening tour from tree to hollow.

As the last glimpse of color of the sunset faded into an ashen-tan scene, the mother blue heron flew by with her distinct choppy flight pattern. She was taking fish to her brood in the distant tall tree. The trees were now a black outline against a bright moon-lit sky.

Thinking that to be the last attempt of feeding before the night, suddenly, to my right, and overhead I heard the sound of wings. It was a large blue heron who had intended to light on the dock, but spying me sitting there, flew a little upstream and lit on the old dock. It sat there very statuesque. I watched it. It watched the waters. Then, just at the right moment and almost too quickly to see, it hit the water and was flying away with the catch. On long extended blue wings, it flew down-stream with its neck tucked back securely, and its feet straight out behind.

As the few thin clouds in the western sky turned black, and the whole sky dulled, the shadows of the giant hickory nut tree, the oak, the cypress, and the bent tree trunk across the way, where the woodpeckers build their nests, all could be seen reflected in the water near the shoreline. The bay tree, now in full bloom, hung over the marsh adding a summer fragrance to the warm evening air.

I arose, not wanting to leave such quiet and beauty, not wanting to leave the scene of evening falling into night over Muskrat Landing.

Just then, two night hawks appeared, making an almost whispering sound, unlike, the shrill call from before. Flying lower and lower, I saw them put down into the marsh. The night was settling in even for the night hawks. So, too, I must return to my abode.

Walking slowly, I wondered how one mind could possibly experience so much beauty, in such a short time?

I noticed the moon had not left me at the end of the dock. I had left its reflection at the water's edge, but now it smiled down from above casting my shadow on the boards as I walked. It followed me through the now dark woods. Its brightness outlined the leaf-covered hill showing me the pathway to home.

All was quiet, now save the distant call of the whip-poor-will. The marsh creatures had whispered their good night. The tide quietly continued to ebb as the warm night fell over Muskrat Landing. The moon would west...then a new day!

