White Ibis

In the marsh
On the West End of Galveston Island
In a remote cove in my kayak.

The tide is high,
The Spartina grass green-gold,
The sky clear blue.

Gliding down a marsh channel,
A white shrimp leaps out of the water.
Beside me, a school of finger mullet
Bolts into the stalks,
Causing a blue crab to shuffle aside,
Orange claws pointed up,
Jagged daggers warning me to stay away.

The white ibis raises her head
From the grassy edge of the marsh pond,
Making eye contact with me,
Determining I am no threat and returning
To ramming her scythe-like beak
Into the soft mud deposited by rainwater,
Runoff of storms long past.

I hear the whoosh and then see
The flight of blue-wing teal flaring up,
Startled by my lime green boat,
Then darting back down,
Setting their wings, settling in to feed.

Kayak thoughts fly through my head.
I’m paddling within a living system,
Experiencing other living things.
This is life.
I’m perceiving it –
I’m getting it in every cell of my body.

The ibis lifts up her head,
The reddish orange bill rising from the
Green-gold marsh grass,
Eyes smiling knowingly at me,
Asking what took me so long.
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With Team 11 behind John and Sally’s place
On Galveston Island in the fall.

The bayou water linked to West Bay is flat
And the high tide is starting to flood in
As four kayaks glide out from the launch,
Each going a slightly different direction,
One across the bayou, one down to the right,
Another heading just a bit up on the left,
And another paddling further toward the bay,
Each searching for a special place
Where a redfish has been found in the past
Or where the water calls us,
Looking for leaping mullet and “busy” water,
Looking for larger ripples along the shoreline,
Looking for a point with submerged oysters,
A channel with a slightly deeper side,
A nook or cranny within the marsh pond,
Looking for anything that gives hope.

Coming around the grassy point
I come face to face with a white ibis
Working the edge of the shoreline,
Long orange bill probing up and down
Into the black, carbon-rich marsh mud,
The best mud on the Texas coast,
Mud full of marine worms and crustaceans,
Rich mud - good ole Texas coastal mud
Where the ibis spends its day.
My spirit goes with the beak of the ibis
As it moves into the mud,
Feeling it gooshing, slowly moving aside,
Feeling the beak secure the wriggling worm -
The ibis meeting its daily physical needs
As I meet my spiritual needs
With nourishment from my Earth temple
A spiritual message of gratefulness
Transmitted by the beak of the ibis.

And later, paddling back, muscles aching,
Watching the roseate spoonbills fly before us,
I am grateful that I came to see the ibis today
And spent quality time with Team 11
On the bayou on the backside of the island.