

VILLAGE VIEW

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Early on a humid misty morning you may waken before daylight brightens the color of the countryside. In that cool hour before night airs begin stirring through the woodlands and along the shores, while the birds are still sleepy, and their murmurings are soft on an August dawn, you may wander alone in the quiet that only such an hour affords.

Few people will you meet. Should some other human you encounter, voice and tone offering greeting (if one be uttered at all) are an almost whisper, so as not to disturb the peace inherent in this magic hour of day.

Later the street will busy with action. Children pedalling bicycles will call to one another, joggers glistening with running sweat will trot past, cars will whirl along, tires humming and motors making engine noises. But no unnatural rackets shatter the stillness of these earliest hours; nothing intrudes but the softest rustle of sea breezes in pine boughs, the cheep of hungry fledglings, the lonely call of a gull winging north, or the caw of a crow at treetop. And those sounds blend naturally and only intensify the solitude.

By mid-day the neighborhood will be abustle. Lonely and still places will be next-to-impossible to find. From every side will come commotions of power mowers, gasoline engines, electric motors, overhead jets, putters of motorboats on the bay, three blasts of a horn signalling the draw-bridge tender, chatter of hedge trimmer, clatter of dishes and silverware, or the rise and fall of voices carrying on the wind.

In the cool of evening, walkers sally forth. Meetings bring conversation, news of friends and acquaintances; social gatherings on screened porches generate happy noise, auto traffic buzzes as people move from recreation to recreation. Not until after midnight shall silence fall, shall all creatures slumber, shall day truly end.

Walking in the small hours holds its own miracles with starlit skies, the halfmoon riding high and pale and lonesome beyond shadowy outlines of trees. In those black hours a walk

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may bring sleep to the wakeful, excitement to the adventure-some, or ease to a troubled mind; then a return to lights and shelter will bring relief, a sensation of escape from unseen threat or danger. A security darkness cannot provide a night wanderer.

Only in the earliest morning when light grows in measured intensity may the peacefulness of our lives be fully savored. Only then may our senses be refreshed and renewed and restored, as they are meant to be, at dawn.

The promise of each day's beginning is one of the gentlest sanity. Not even the cricket sings. A hurried red squirrel may cross your path, but he will not scold. Slow-pacing quail may turn from feeding among weeds to a camouflage in the underbrush, but will not fly.

You may be joined by a friendly hound. His panting breath could startle you, so loud it comes, as he finds, joyfully, a companion for his morning exercise, but he will not bark. This is a time for stillness. Even the beasts respect the tranquility and make their own efforts to maintain the moment undisturbed.

Mists swirl over the marsh, along the edge of a creek. Pulsing rays of sun, higher now, make iridescent wisps of cloud trailing the pathway. Dew hangs in heavy droplets, bending with water-weight the blades of grasses. Twiglets look thickened, magnified with moisture. A catbird flits among understory branches, keeps pace watchfully as you go; he makes your way his as well, perhaps in curiosity.

Should your path lead to a watering place, a pond, a fish will leap, breaking the smooth surface soundlessly, but returning to its element with a splash. Unexpected, and leaving only the widening circlet of ripples as proof it happened, the slap of water could surprise you. This sound would go unheeded in another hour, but now comes loud as a rifle crack.

Signs of life abound. Blueberry thickets bear ripening fruit; branches, laden with clusters of still-green globes, hang low. One by one each small sphere will blush red and next day shame the sky with its depth of azure.

Underfoot, velvety new leaves of mayflower patches unfurl and go unnoticed. Among rotting oak leaves bloom the shin-leaf, sending up white flowerets on stalks a full eight inches tall. The wild azalea scents the mist with sweetness no cultivated foundation plant can boast. And Indian pipes poke in clusters, ghosts in miniature that walk the forest floor.

Perhaps you take to open beach. Here the mist blankets heaving waves. Even these, coming ashore in steady pace, break softly in little rushes licking the edge of sand. No thundrous combers roar and thud, no whitecaps top the seas. The surface of the water lies smooth under shrouding fog. Only at its hemline where shallows push moving water to lacy froth against the shelving shingle is the ocean's music to be heard. The barest tinkle of shells and stones jingle in the morning's gleam.

The fog muffles both sight and sound. As you walk east, the fog takes a rosy cast, behind it the rising sun. The fog clings wetly to your face, thick enough to be almost palpable against your fingertips. Your clothing soaks, absorbs the fog, feels wet. The fog tastes salty, smells of fishy things, but clean.

Turn and walk west with the sun behind you, unable yet to warm your back or dry your shirt. A breeze tugs your hair, even your eyelashes, sending swirls of fog aloft to reveal the path you seek to retrace your steps.

Turn homeward, hungry now for coffee, breakfast and companionship.

Put beach behind you as mists thin. Take the woodland path that skirts the pond. Bright light now and brisk with stirring start of day. In full sunshine an approaching neighbor lifts a cheery hail, alert and fresh. No thought now, of hushing normal speech. Morning has arrived.

The silence of an early hour, and its solitudes, are gone with the fogs and mists all drifted into a yesterday before today is yet begun. The salve of stilly dawn has done its healing.