

# village view

by Andrea Leonard

This week has been one of frustration and discomfort, demanding much more patience and self-control than usual! I sprained my ankle.

Sounds commonplace enough, certainly. You're buzzing about your business, you step off a step... crunch. You're laid up for weeks. I'd almost rather be really sick. Then, at least, I'd be content doing nothing.

But here am I, perfectly healthy (except for one leg from the knee down), full of energy, plans, aspirations and ideas... and unable to put any of them into action.

Doctor's orders: Spend 90% of your time flat on your back with your foot elevated; use your crutches and keep off the ankle; soak it in warm water several times a day; wear the elastic bandage until the middle of next week.

And because I want to be running around again as soon as possible, I'm doing as I was told. And complaining about it.

Fortunately, I can still read, write after a fashion, and think.

When you're immobilized you think more minutely than when you're up-and-about; your attention isn't diverted from its concentration on little things; you can't do most of the things you're accustomed to doing, even if you want to, so give your mind a freer rein and follow wherever it leads.

The first thing in the morning, instead of getting out of bed when you wake up, you look through the window at the trees and sky; your imagination plays its games and tricks with your vision. There, framed by the window mullions, is a woman's face.

Painted by the light and shadow of early sun on a muddle of green leaves, her face is that of a pensive motherly person, lost in thought or reminiscence.

It would, it seems, be an easy matter to reproduce those planes of light and shadow with a few strokes of a brush or pencil on paper. Try it; the effort is a vain one.

Your eye falls on the folds of the rumpled bedding. Here, too, are images. There's a gently rolling plain and in the background towering mountains rear; above them a cloudy sky is swept and streaked with wind-driven clouds.

You know, of course, it's a bedsheet, not a landscape, but the picture is there before your eyes, and your imagination first lays tender colors of spring on the foothills, then the greens of full summer on the meadow, followed by the rich foliage of autumn on the mountains of tumbled linen. A moment later the pigment fades, leaving a wintry scene, a vista of plains and mountains, snowbound.

Our prankish inner-eyes toy with clouds as they float through blue skies, catch flashes of dreams in dancing flames and glowing embers of campfires. Watching the steady roll of waves approaching a beach mesmerizes us, and our minds create likenesses, stopping action that cannot be stopped, as torrents rush over a waterfall.

These ever-changing never-ceasing elements-in-motion have a peculiar fascination for us whenever we take time to watch and let imagination carry us, as though gliding on a raft through a limestone cave, illuminated invisibly, past the marvelous shapes and colors that only time and water droplets seeping through hairline cracks of stone can create.

Patterned materials, draping and hanging in folds, supply more non-pictures. There, in the curtain of flowered fabric, is the head of a dog, a spaniel. Its ears are long, silky and end in curling tendrils. You know there's no dog's head printed on the curtain, but at just the right angle, in just the right light, you see it, see the soft brown eye, even see the shine of a wet black nose. You move your own head an inch... he's gone.

Memories, of course, all these pretend-things must be. Could they be seen, imaginatively, had they not been seen before in reality? Could something be imagined if it hadn't once been visible? Been real? Quite possibly, almost certainly, it could.

How else does the artist conceive a form hitherto unknown? How else do gnomes, witches, elves, trolls come into our literature and lives? Whence came the unicorn? Ghosts? Angels? Winged cherubs? Devils and demons?

Folklore is replete with imaginary creatures the likes of which have never been seen of the face of the earth as it's known to our species of mankind. And yet architecture has been richly decorated with monstrous creatures we call gargoyles; surely these hideous faces are but imaginings and not

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replicas of animals that ever lived, breathed and reproduced their kind.

Art, through the ages, provides a wealth of impossibly weird birds and beasts, Where were their forms originally found?

Did their creators find their shapes and expressions amidst clouds, in flickering firelight, in shadows of leafy trees, staring from the rough bark of towering forests?

Or were these grimaces first seen through the flying spume of a bow-wave, thrown high as the prow of a wind-driven ship cut through an ocean wave?

Shall we ever know? Hardly to be expected. Still, we can guess, as we let ourselves see what we know isn't truly there, that such forms might have been created by the first artist who dared to portray what his imagination found revealed where no such form existed.

Were they ridiculed or were they worshipped? Were they frightening to the ignorant and illiterate? Were the gentler forms, the babies with sweet smiles and wings, the angels and cherubim, created with love and compassion, and did they inspire love and tenderness?

And the artist, what of him? Was he praised or panned?

As civilizations come and go, each deposits its relics for following cultures to ponder upon and interpret as they will. Things outlast people, the great and the small.

And the things left by each wave of culture can be likened to seashells cast upon the shores of time. In the present we picked through them, gathering those unfragmented ones, collecting and classifying them, seeking one perfect sample of as many different types as we can find.

The damaged ones, those the sea and sands have eroded, we cast aside where, in time, they will be ground to dust and eventually form again part of the exo-skeleton of some animal building a protective shell.

And so, exactly so, shall the stones and mortar of today's man-made structures come full circle, over time.

These are things one thinks upon, the large and the small, given enforced inactivity and seemingly endless hours with one foot elevated while an ankle mends -- and the birds harvest my blueberries.