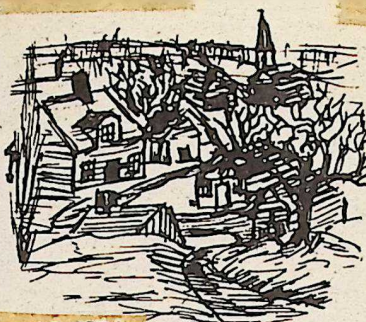
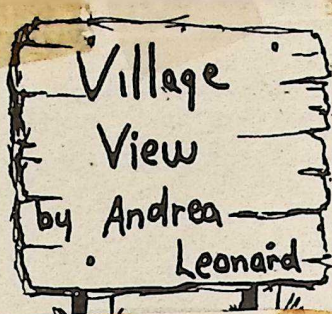




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Spring has been coming gently to the Cape for several weeks and you've noticed it, I'm sure. The days are longer and warmer, the wind less biting, the rains softer, gentler, shorter.

You've seen the crocus blooming, the swaying jonquils and daffodils, the pink and white apple blossoms, the blowing tulips, the trailing forsythia, the sturdy hyacinth bells.

Soon the dogwood will spread its quarter-foil in pinks and ivories, the lilac's shades of purple to snowy will bloom, and azalea and rhododendron will blaze at every foundation.

In June the roses will come -- at least they always have in that month and can be expected again this year.

These are signs of Spring everyone notices. Others sometimes come and go without being seen, felt or heard.

Did you see the willows turn from silver to gold long before the leaves came out?

Did you find a patch of mayflowers hidden beneath a protective blanket of dried oak leaves? Did you get down on your knees and smell them? (And offer thanks while you were there?)

Did you notice when the grass turned from drab to green? Did you welcome the return of the red-wing blackbird? These are earliest signs of spring each March.

Did you hear the blue jays sing their mating call? You may still hear them tinkling to one another if you let yourself, in the early morning hours. Did you hear the chickadees call one another "Sweetee"?

Did you watch the last of the ice leave the ponds? Did you mark the date the geese returned to the marsh? Already there are goslings paddling after goose and gander.

Did you see the shad come into flower? The woodland bears its softness -- pale, delicate, pastel -- like a father leading his shy and trembling daughter-bride to the altar of the forest. The rest of the year shad stands in the shadow but in May it's radiant with the message, "Time to plant corn."

The shad blooms when the herring run -- and your corn will benefit from three herring to a hill, along with the seed. Protect the corn seedlings -- or the blue jays will get each and every one.

Has your marsh turned green yet? Watch it change with each rinse of the tide. Have you caught sight of color on your broad-leaf ever-green shrubs. The breaking buds are there, waiting for you to look.

Surely you saw the pussy willows come and

go, but are you watching the oaks come into bloom? The pines, too, will blossom in the first two weeks of June. You'll know it, for certain; the pollen will sift and drift into your house and lay up on every surface a golden-green dust.

Wait to set up your porch or patio with summer furniture until the pollen is rained away. It'll save you scrubbing everything twice.

You heard the peepers, of course, -- the pinkletinks -- the tiny frog who sings at twilight. It's doubtful you saw one, though, unless you went to the swamp with your flashlight, waited in the silence until your coming was forgotten, and then, while they were in full-voice, shone your light on the rotting stumps and caught the swollen throats of these tiny creatures.

If you did do that, you got damp and chilled, and were treated to a special thrill not many have shared. It's too much trouble. This miracle of nature, too much trouble?

This bountiful life-promising season is as much a garden as the carefully-cultivated ones to come this summer.

This is everyone's garden. The woodland -- the little plants and the big ones; the birds -- little ones and large ones; the land creatures -- small ones and smaller; the water-life, seen and unseen.

Each of us may share the garden of Cape Cod woods. We can help ourselves to the flavors of wild fruits -- checkerberry, blueberry, blackberry and wild black cherry.

We can feast upon all manner of roots, leaves, flowers and fungus, each edible and nutritious, if we but take the time to learn which are good and which harmful.

We can breathe the fragrances and renew ourselves with the beauty of each plant and tree and bush, as it comes into bloom.

The wild flowers emit far sweeter scents than the larger showier cultivated blossoms. Even roses can't compete with trailing arbutus or wild honeysuckle for perfumes.

The wondrous part of this garden-for-everyone is it needs no special care or attention; it asks nothing from us.

Whether we're here to see it, the trees put out their tiny flowers, pollinate themselves, bear their fruits and go dormant in winter.

Whether we're here to watch, birds return to breeding grounds, build their nests, produce their eggs, hatch their fledglings, feed and