

The Sandman Cometh:

A June evening with the sun peeking through western oaks as the last light settles for the night reminds me of certain summer days that ended as I went upstairs, long ago, in the still-light night. I was never so happy to be off to bed as on those days. It was a dream of mine to wake up to the sun's rise and nod off as it slowly set. Still is. Makes me happy.

It's different here of course, here in the glory of birdsong and buzzing. Here where neighbors are imagined to still be awake, imagined because they are unheard and unseen. Here in the far country so different from my first long, long days out east. Back there it was crowded and vaguely noisy and not so vaguely noisy but often clamorous. The chatter and batter of the streets would last long after I was dreaming. But even through all that the evening light was, and still is, the evening light. It's like dozing in a bath of tomato soup, like pulling up a blanket of grilled cheese sandwiches. There is comfort food and there is comfort light. They are part and parcel of some half-dreamed place where lingering smiles and no talk are the rule.

To be drifting on that twilight raft, floating between now and dreams, is a tender thing. Eyes open every now and then to reveal tree shapes and moving leaves and the always diligent phoebe, all of them held in gray and grayer shades. There is no time at this time. Ebbing images are suspended and every time I look again the pictures are the same and still there. I am never awake when they disappear altogether on these nights and that too is welcome. To be taken across quietly is a gift. It is a good night and we will go gently into it.

I used to think of my day on the golf course as I lay dozing or a day in business or the day in 1963 that we walked up the Hudson River. Now I don't think. There are such riches just outside our windows that thinking is a distraction. What is to be done, instead, is to let the beauty wash. Let the woods weave their spells. Let the birds sing me onward. Let that rustling in the brush be a story untold. Let this gray light show itself in blue and purple. Let the sweet fragrance of the wet forest fill any space that might have been used for thinking.

These minutes before dream sleep are what we lose to television and thinking. These minutes are the wash that clears the mind. These minutes in touch with things sensual are the doorway from life awake and reasoned towards life asleep and also reasoned...differently.

They are the doorway to dreams, dreams that are one path to knowledge. We are never more in touch with ourselves than when we dream. The difficulty comes in sorting the symbols and getting used to our own imagery. Dreams are difficult because they are in code. We make them impossible because we are ignorant of our own special language. But enough about dreams. They will take care of themselves whether we pay attention or not. The shame is wasting them.

As for the delicious time just before our dreams, call it dozing or drowsy or nodding, we would be wise to let it lead for that moment. If you can enjoy your vulnerable self, the person you are when you are defenseless and floating, you will be more powerful in the waking world of deadlines and decisions. It is one thing to accept yourself when you are in control and quite another to accept yourself when control is fading. They are both you. They are both real and they are both good. Those of us who can not sleep in peace suffer for it. There is no up side. Be it three hours or eight hours, tranquility is the key. Rest is rest and the rest is angst. Angst is no friend to the soul nor shall it ever be. When the Sandman comes, open your heart.