Thoreau

The great story of the night is the moon's adventures with the clouds. What innumerable encounters she has had with them.

Sitting on the sleepers of the bridge, which is being repaired, now at 3 o'clock, I hear a cock crow. How admirably adapted to the hour is that sound! as if made of the first rays of light rending the darkness—the creaking of the sun's axle beard already over the eastern hills.

Though man's life is trivial and handwoven, Nature is holy & heroic. With what infinite faith & promise & moderation begins each new day! It is only a little after 3 o'clock and already there is evidence of morning in the sky.

A solitary horse in his pasture was scared by the sudden sight of me standing still in the moonlight—an apparition to him, and moved about inspecting with alarm, but when I spoke & he heard the sound of my voice he was at once reassured, and expressed his pleasure by wagging his stump of a tail, though still half a dozen rods off.

How wholesome the taste of huckleberries when now by moonlight I feel for them amid the bushes.

The sand is warm (yet beneath the surface) & the rocks are warm to the hand tonight—so that I sit on them or lean against them for warmth, though indeed, it is not cold down here.

And now the first sign of morning attracts the traveller's attention, and he cannot help rejoicing, and the moon begins gradually to fade from my recollection. The wind rises & rustles the copses.

As I walk along the side of Fair Haven Hill, I see a ripple on the river;—and now the moon has gone behind a large & black mass of clouds, & I realize that I may not see her again in her glory this night—that perchance ere she issues from this obscurity the sun will have risen, and she will appear
but as a cloud herself, and sink unnoticed into the west (being a little after full—a day (?))

As yet no sounds of awakening men, only the more frequent crowing of cocks still standing on their porches in the barns. The milkmen are the earliest risers, though I see no lanthorns carried to their barns in the distance—preparing to carry the milk of cows in their tin cans for men's breakfasts—even for those who dwell in distant cities. In the twilight now, by the light of the stars alone, the moon being concealed they are pouring the bounteous streams from the full udders into their milk pails, & the sound of the streaming milk is all that breaks rare stillness of the dawn—distributing the milk to such as have no cows.

I perceive no mosquitoes now; are they nocturnal like the singing of the whippoorwills?

I see the light of the obscured moon reflected bright from the river; With what mild emphasis Nature marks the spot! So bright & serene a sheen that does not more contrast with the night.

It is 4 o'clock. What a dawn, a dignity a glory to the earth to see the light of the moon reflected from her streams. There are but us three—the moon, the earth which wears the jewel (the moon's reflection) in her crown—and myself.

Now there has come round the cliffs on which I sit, (which face the west) all unobserved & mingled with the dusky sky of night (waifs of?) a lighter & more ethereal living blue, whispering of the sun still far away behind the horizon.

From the summit of our atmosphere perchance he may already be seen by soaring spirits that inhabit those thin upper regions, & they communicate the glorious intelligence to us lower ones—The real, divine the heavenly blue, the zone containing air it is I see through this dusky lower stratum the sun gilding the summits of the air. The sight as a broad artery flows all over the sky.
Yet not without sadness & compassion I reflect that I shall not see the moon again in her glory.

Not far from 4, still in the night, I hear a night-hawk squeak & soar high in the air as I sit on the cliff. What is said about this being less of a night bird than the whippoorwill is perhaps to be questioned. For neither do I remember to have heard the whippoorwill sing at 12 o'clock, (though I met one sitting & flying between 2 & 3 this morning) I believe that both may be heard at midnight though very rarely.

As far as my observation goes the whippoorwills sing for several hours in the early part of the night, are silent commonly at midnight or you may meet them sitting on a rock or flitting silently about—then sing again just before sunrise.

Now at very earliest dawn the night hawk booms & the whippoorwill sings. Returning down the hill by the path to where the woods are cut off, I see the signs of the day—the morning red. There is the lurid morning star soon to be blotted out by a cloud.

There is an early redness in the east, which I was not prepared for, changing to amber or saffron—with clouds beneath in the horizon & also above the clear streak.

The birds utter a few languid & yawning notes as if they had not left their perches, so sensible to light to wake so soon—A faint peeping sound from I know not what kind—a slight innocent half awake sound—like the sounds which a quiet housewife makes in the earliest dawn—They awake with song as some infants are said to awake with a smile. Nature preserves her innocence like a beautiful child. I hear a wood thrush even now, long before sunrise, as in the heat of the day, and the pewee & the catbird, and the vireo red eyed(?)—the
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wood thrush —that beautiful singer inviting the day once more to enter his fine wood. I do not hear or I do not mind perchance the crickets now. Now whippoorwills commence to sing in earnest, considerably after the wood thrush. So you may hear the wood thrush & whippoorwills at the same time.

Now 2 whippoorwills go by in haste seeking some coverts from the eye of day—& the bats are flying about on the edge of the wood, improving the last moments of their day in catching insects.

The moon appears at length, not yet as a cloud, but with a brown light, ominous of her fate. The early cars sound like a wind in the woods.

The chewinks make a business now of waking each other up with their low “zorwick” in the neighboring low copse.

The sun would have shone before but for the cloud. Now on his rising— not the clear sky, but the cheeks of the clouds high & wide are tinged with red, which like the sky before turns gradually to saffron & then to the white light of day.

This day—a fuller moon shines. We have more of that same light which the moon sent, as shining more directly. The sun is a fuller moon. Who knows how much lighter day there may be.

Aug 23 '52

To Cliffs at 2 P.M. moon ½ full.

As I go up the back road I hear the loud ringing creak of crickets, louder singers, on each apple tree by the roadside, with an intermittent pulsing creak. Not the sound of a bird all the way to the woods.

How dark the shadows of the pines & oaks fall across the woodland path— There is a new tree, another forest in the shadow. It is pleasant walking in these forest paths with heavy darkness on one side & a silvery moonlight on the
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oak leaves on the other, but when the trees meet overhead, I tread the chequered
floor of finely divided light & shade.

How picturesque the moonlight on rocks in the woods!

I hear a faint metallic twitter from a bird, so faint that if uttered
at noonday it would not be heard—not so loud as a cricket.

I cannot remember the last moon.

Now I sit on the cliffs & look abroad over the river & Cas-
I can see N. faintly.

I live so much in a routine of thought that I forget there is any
outside to the globe, and am surprised when I behold it as now—yonder hills &
river in the moonlight—the mountains. Yet it is salutary to deal with the surface
of things. What are these rivers & hills—these hieroglyphics which my eyes
behold? There is something invigorating in this air which I am peculiarly sensible
is a real wind blowing from over the surface of a planet. I look out at my eyes.
I come to my window, and I feel & breathe the fresh air. It is a fact equally
glorious with the most inward experiences. Why have we ever slandered the
outward? The perception of our faces will always have the effect of miracle to
a sane sense.

I descend the rock & return through the woods to the R.R.

To night there were no fire-flies—no night hawks nor whippoorwills.