

Three Days To See

A

I have often thought it would be a blessing if each human being were stricken blind and deaf for a few days at some time during his early adult life. Darkness would make him more appreciative of sight; silence would teach him the joys of sound.

appreciative = thankful; grateful

joy = pleasure; happiness

B

Now and then I have tested my seeing friends to discover what they see. Recently I asked a friend, who had just returned from a long walk in the woods, what she had observed. "Nothing in particular," she replied. How was it possible, I asked myself, to walk for an hour through the woods and see nothing worthy of note? I who cannot see find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch. I feel the delicate symmetry of a leaf. I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of a silver birch, or the rough, shaggy bark of a pine. In spring I touch the branches of trees hopefully in search of a bud, the first sign of awakening Nature after her winter's sleep. Occasionally, if I am very fortunate, I place my hand gently on a small tree and feel the happy quiver of a bird in full song.

now and then = sometimes

woods = a small forest

mere = nothing more than; nothing more important than

The mere fact that Greene plays for the Yankees gives him a lot of visibility.

The city receives a mere 20% of the parking revenues.

delicate = small and having a beautiful shape or appearance

his delicate hands

symmetry = the exact match in size and shape between two halves, parts or sides of something

The trees break the symmetry of the painting.

birch = a tree with smooth, often white bark (= outer covering) and thin branches

shaggy = long and untidy

bark = the skin of a tree

bud = a small part of a plant, that develops into a flower or leaf

quiver = trembling

C

At times my heart cries out with longing to see all these things. If I can get so much pleasure from mere touch, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight. And I have imagined what I should most like to see if I were given the use of my eyes, say, for just three days. I should divide the period into three parts. On the first day, I should want to see the people whose kindness and companionship have made my life worth living. I do not know what it is to see into the heart of a friend through that "window of the soul," the eye. I can only "see" through my fingertips the outline of a face. I can detect laughter, sorrow, and many other obvious emotions. I know my friends from the feel of their faces. How much easier, how much more satisfying it is for you who can see to grasp quickly the essential qualities of another person by watching the subtleties of expression, the quiver of a muscle, the flutter of a hand. But does it ever occur to you to use your sight to see into the inner nature of a friend? Do not most of you seeing people grasp casually the outward features of a face and let it go at that? For instance, can you describe accurately the faces of five good friends? As an experiment, I have questioned husbands about the color of their wives' eyes, and often they express embarrassed confusion and admit that they do not know. Oh, the things that I should see if had the power of sight for just three days!

longing = desire; eagerness

companionship = the enjoyment of spending time with other people

grasp = understand

subtleties = the small but important details or aspects of something

She was too young to grasp the subtleties of the film.

expression = the look in someone's face

express = say; state

D

The first day would be a busy one. I should call to me all my dear friends and look long into their faces, imprinting upon my mind the outward evidences of the beauty that is within them. I should let my eyes rest, too, on the face of a baby so that I could catch a vision of the eager, innocent beauty which precedes the individual's consciousness of the conflicts which life develops. I should like to see the books which have revealed to me the deepest channels of human life. And I should like to look into the loyal, trusting eyes of my dogs, the little Scottie and the stalwart Great Dane. In the afternoon, I should take a long walk in the woods and intoxicate my eyes on the beauties of the world of Nature. And I should pray for the glory of a colorful sunset. That night, I think, I should not be able to sleep.

imprint = to fix an event or experience so firmly in the memory that it cannot be forgotten although you do not try to remember it

That look of grief would be imprinted on her mind forever.

precede = to be or go before something or someone in time or space

Kofi Annan preceded Ban Ki-moon as the Secretary-General of the UN.

It would be helpful if you were to precede the report with an introduction.

stalwart = loyal

intoxicate = to make someone excited, happy, and slightly out of control

The plant has the power to heal or intoxicate.

It took surprisingly little drink to intoxicate him.

intoxicate = (of alcohol or drugs) to cause somebody to lose control of their behavior or their physical and mental abilities

Their music never fails to intoxicate me.

Just the names are enough to intoxicate: Monet, Picasso, Cézanne, Modigliani.

E

The next day, I should arise with the dawn and see the thrilling miracle by which night is transformed into day. I should behold with awe the magnificent panorama of light with which the sun awakens the sleeping earth. This day I should devote to a hasty glimpse of the world, past and present. I should want to see the pageant of man's progress, and so I should go to the museums. There my eyes would see the condensed history of the earth animals and the races of men pictured in their native environment: gigantic carcasses of dinosaurs and mastodons which roamed the earth before man appeared, with his tiny stature and powerful brain, to conquer the animal kingdom.

behold = to see or look at someone or something

The new bridge is an incredible sight to behold.

panorama /ˌpæn.əˈræm.ə/(American)/ˌpæn.ərˈɑː.mə/ (British) = a view of a wide area of land; vista

panorama = a description, study or set of pictures that presents all the different aspects or stages of a particular subject, event, etc.

pageant /ˈpædʒ.ənt/ = public show; beauty contest

condensed = concise; abridged

carcass = the dead body of an animal

mastodon /ˈmæs.tə.dɑːn/ = a large animal similar to an elephant, but with fur, that existed on the Earth until around 10,000 years ago

F

My next stop would be the Museum of Art. I know well through my hands the sculptured gods and goddesses of the ancient Nile land. I have felt copies of Parthenon friezes, and I have sensed the rhythmic beauty of charging Athenian warriors. The gnarled, bearded features of Homer are dear to me, for he, too, knew blindness. So on this, my second day, I should try to probe into the soul of man through his art. The things I knew through touch I should now see. More splendid still, the whole magnificent world of painting would be opened to me. I should be able to get only a superficial impression. Artists tell me that for a deep and true appreciation of art one must educate the eye. One must learn through experience to weigh the merits of line, of composition, of form, and color. If I had eyes, how happily would I embark on so fascinating a study!

Parthenon /'pɑːr.θə.nɑːn/ = a building that is part of the Acropolis (= the remains of an ancient Greek city in Athens), and that was a temple (= a place of worship) of the goddess Athena

friezes = a border that goes around the top of a room or building with pictures or carvings on it

charge = to move forward quickly and violently, especially towards something that has caused difficulty or anger

gnarled = rough; wrinkled

probe into = investigate

embark on = set off on a trip; start a journey

G

The evening of my second day, I should spend at a theater or at the movies. How I should like to see the fascinating figure of Hamlet, or the gusty Falstaff amid colorful Elizabethan trappings! I cannot enjoy the beauty of rhythmic movement except in a sphere restricted to the touch of my hands. I can vision only dimly the grace of a Pavlova, although I know something of the delight of rhythm, for often I can sense the beat of music as it vibrates through the dance floor. I can well imagine that cadenced motion must be one of the most pleasing sights in the world. I have been able to gather something of this by tracing with my fingers the lines in sculptured marble: if this static grace can be so lovely, how much more acute must be the thrill of seeing grace in motion.

Hamlet = a character in one of Shakespeare's plays

Falstaff = a character in one of Shakespeare's plays

gusty = windy

trappings = the possessions, clothes, etc. that are connected with a particular situation, job or social position

dimly = not clearly

grace = beauty; glory

Pavlova = a Russian ballet dancer

cadenced = rhythmic; harmonious

H

The following morning, I should again greet the dawn, anxious to discover new delights, new revelations of beauty. Today, this third day, I shall spend in the workaday world, amid the haunts of men going about the business of life. The city becomes my destination. First, I stand at a busy corner, merely looking at people trying by sight of them to understand something of their daily lives. I see smiles, and I am happy. I see serious determination, and I am proud. I see suffering, and I am compassionate. I stroll down Fifth Avenue. I throw my eyes out of focus so that I see no particular object but only a seething kaleidoscope of color. I am certain that the colors of women's dresses moving in a throng must be a gorgeous spectacle of which I should never tire. But perhaps if I had sight, I should be like most other women—too interested in styles to give much attention to the splendor of color in the mass. From Fifth Avenue I make a tour of the city—to the slums, to factories, to parks where children play. I take a stay-at-home trip abroad by visiting the foreign quarters. Always my eyes are open wide to all the sights of both happiness and misery so that I may probe deep and add to my understanding of how people work and live.

workaday = ordinary; not unusual

amid = between; among; in the middle of

haunt = a place often visited

This restaurant was one of our old haunts.

merely = just; only

determination = strong will

stroll = walk gently

kaleidoscope = a toy consisting of a tube that you look through with loose pieces of colored glass and mirrors at the end. When the tube is turned, the pieces of glass move and form different patterns

kaleidoscope = a situation, pattern, etc. containing a lot of different parts that are always changing

throng = crowd

spectacle = show; display

slum = the neighborhood of poor people

quarter = neighborhood; district; an area of a town where a particular group of people live or work or where a particular activity happens

This is the bustling commercial quarter of the city.

I

My third day of sight is drawing to an end. Perhaps there are many serious pursuits to which I should devote the few remaining hours, but I am afraid that on the evening of that last day I should again run away to the theater, to a hilariously funny play, so that I might appreciate the overtones of comedy in the human spirit. At midnight permanent night would close in on me again. Naturally in those three short days I should not have seen all I wanted to see. Only when darkness had again descended upon me should I realize how much I had left unseen.

pursuit = hobby = an activity that you spend time doing, usually when you are not working

hilariously = in a way that is extremely funny

overtones = an attitude or an emotion that is suggested and is not expressed in a direct way

descend = come down ≠ ascend = go up

J

Perhaps this short outline does not agree with the program you might set for yourself if you knew that you were about to be stricken blind. I am, however, sure that if you faced that fate, you would use your eyes as never before. Everything you saw would become dear to you. Your eyes would touch and embrace every object that came within your range of vision. Then, at last, you would really see, and a new world of beauty would open itself before you.

embrace = hug; hold sb/sth in your arms

K

I who am blind can give one hint to those who see: Use your eyes as if tomorrow you would be stricken blind. And the same method can be applied to the other senses. Hear the music of voices, the song of a bird, the mighty strains of an orchestra, as if you would be stricken deaf tomorrow. Touch each object as if tomorrow your tactile sense would fail. Smell the perfume of flowers; taste with relish each morsel, as if tomorrow you could never smell and taste again. Make the most of every sense: glory in all the facets of pleasure and beauty which the world reveals to you through the several means of contact which Nature provides. But of all the senses, I am sure that sight must be the most delightful.

hint = clue; tip; advice

tactile = related to the sense of touch

relish = pleasure

morsel = each bite of food; portion

facet = aspect; one part of a subject, situation, etc. that has many parts

She has so many facets to her personality.