

Interlude By The Sea

Over the past weekend, the editor of this newspaper was at Cape Lookout with friends, far from the clack of typewriters or the groan of a starting press run.

In fact, all artificial sounds had been washed from that coastal air until nothing could be heard but what belonged there: the cry of sweeping gulls, the slap of sea water folding up lace-edged along a sandy shore, and the wind which came sometimes in a flat, cool brush of air and other times played whistling through the sea grass and along the house eaves.

At first the ear drum remains taut for accustomed sounds. It is alert for that telephone which will ring any minute, the alarming clock, some radio screeching forth the virtues of Corn Flakes, tooting car horns.

But when time slides by and none of these things happen, the ear, vacant and suprised, begins to take each sound and really hear it. Then one gull is found to call on a different note from his fellow, and this wave strikes the sand more flatly, while the next one roars and the small ones follow, whispering.

The eyes make the next adjustment. At first they adjust to sheer distance --- that sea stretching half a world away, sweeps of sand left by the wind in whorls and patterns, a sky so crowded with stars that some seem to have dropped down shoulder height.

And the same eye which has witnessed a hundred hastening automobiles without interest now fixes itself on the lone boat riding the edge of the sea and follows it out of sight with lingering pleasure.

And suppose someone came along while that eye was treasuring the boat and the ear was singing to the rhythm of wind and water; and the someone said, "What are you thinking?"

The answer, delivered on a relaxed sigh, would be "Nothing. Nothing at all."

To be free of thought is, for a little time, like an escape from tyranny. Only the senses are receiving impressions, and the brain recording each one and turning it over and over the way a child will turn a stone to watch the light play on the crystals. So, by the sea, the brain turns its impressions this way and that, trying to grasp each one more fully and more intensely and, for this little piece of time, without measuring it, or deciding about it, or even commenting on it. Just letting life happen, the way a flower lets rain and sunlight fall about it in an unwilling shower.

Surely nothing seems more corny in this age of rockets and nuclear testing that the view that the earth and the seasons and the elements still retain their power to nourish the spirit.

But they do retain it. They do exercise it.

This weekend I could have dumped all the world's supply of tranquilizers into the foaming surf and done nothing for the next week but watch the sea dissolved them, and toy with them; and digest them. And had I been one millimeter more relaxed myself, floated on off like a cork on the brine to see how lovely the world must be in all directions.