

Essay on The Countryside at Night

I sat on the bank of the fish-pond peering through the thickening darkness at the red and white float attached to my fishing line. I saw the float jerk suddenly and instinctively pulled up the fishing rod. Nothing, the line felt empty. I must be imagining things. I threw the line back into the water.

It was hopeless. I had to admit that it was too dark to fish. Night has settled and I would have to quit. So I picked up the two tilapias that I had caught earlier and got up.

As I looked around me to pick my way back to the house I realized that it was certainly very dark. I could not even see the ground in front of me. Fortunately, I knew roughly the way back. So I began to tread carefully along what I reasoned to be the right path. Even so, I missed my steps many times. The going was not easy. To add to the misery, hordes of mosquitoes seemed to suddenly materialize from nowhere to attack me. Furthermore, my fishing rod kept getting caught in the thick undergrowth.

After what seemed an eternity I finally reached the main path that led to my Aunt's house. My hands and feet were sore from the cuts and bites I received while blundering my way through the undergrowth. The friendly shrubs in the day time became monsters in the night. The mosquitoes were never my friends.

My cousin was waiting for me when I reached the back door of the house, guided of course by the house lights. He had a torchlight in his hand. He told me he was about to go and look for me as it was already late. Anyway, there I was, back at the house, with a sore body but with two fish to show for my trouble.

After a bath and a wonderful dinner, I sat on the front porch with my cousin, Rh Chai. He and his family live in the countryside rearing poultry and fish for a living.

I Could hear all sorts of sounds coming from around me Shrills, shrieks, and croaks filled the night air. recognised the sounds of the frogs by the fish-pond, the chirping of crickets and the occasional clicking of the gecko lizard, but for most of the other sounds, I had no idea what made them. My cousin identified them for me, but it hardly made any sense to me. I was quite ignorant about the fauna of the CountrySide.

As impossible it was to see more than ten feet into the darkness, the stars and constellations of millions of miles away can be distinctly seen in the black sky. The sight was something else to behold. Here in the countryside, far away from the glare of the city lights, the milky way was clearly visible. I could identify the constellation of Orion easily. Sirius, the brightest star in the sky looked absolutely dazzling. I could even identify Jupiter and Mars by their unique colors and sizes. As rattled off the names of constellations, stars and planets it was Ah Chars turn to be ignorant.

The mosquitoes that were bothering me seemed to have lessened to a manageable number. Ah, Chai never seemed bothered by the mosquitoes.

Later, Ah Chai invited me to go on an excursion by the fish-pond. I was reluctant to go, but he assured me that it would be a painless and pleasant experience. So armed with a torchlight each, I followed Ah Chai.

He knew the way very well. Never once did I encounter a bush in my way or missed a step. Soon we were at the fish-pond. We walked gingerly along the bank. Suddenly Ah Chai stopped and motioned me to

look at where his torchlight was pointing. Caught in the beam of light was a terrapin. It seemed too stunned to move. It was a medium-size one, about. 15 cm across. Obviously it was resting by the water's edge when Ah Chai surprised it.

In a similar. fashion, Ah Chai surprised an eel, a number of frogs and large grass carp. Never in my life had I witnessed such animals in their natural state. What a wonderful experience it was.

Soon we have covered the accessible part of the bank. We headed back to the house. On our way, I could see and hear fruit bats busy at work on the fruit trees. Once in awhile a nightjar fluttered noisily away at our approach.

Back at the house, it was time for bed. Country folks sleep early. They have to because they rise early. So I crawled under the mosquito netting on to the bed while Ah Chai dowsed the kerosene lamp. I lay back on my bed, breathing in the cool night air and listening to the unending cries of insects and animals. It took a long time for me to get to sleep.