

## The Itching Hour

It's 9:30 p.m. I've had a pleasant day. I enjoyed three good meals, plus a few hearty snacks. I got in some physical activity and ticked a few items off my to-do list. I had a phone call from a dear friend, taking the edge off my hunger for social connection. Now I am tucked into bed with an absorbing book, two chunky furballs purring at my side. Yes, life has provided many blessings in the form of creature comforts today. I offer a prayer of thanks.

But my greedy heart yearns for more. My limbs quiver with a ripple of apprehension. And turning off the light arouses my senses rather than soothing them.

The *witching hour*, well-known in folklore, is when ghosts and demons are said to be freed to roam. No ghosts hover above my head tonight. Just rambling thoughts about a troubled civilization right outside my door, thoughts that cause an occasional flare-up of itches and twitches.

That bedtime phenomenon might be better known to those of us who lead a solitary life chosen for us by fate. The busyness of the daytime hours is a lovely distraction. No, much more than a distraction, since it encompasses the activities that are the substance of living. Of making our small difference in this big world.

Then comes nightfall. There is something about the extreme quiet of a bedroom inhabited by a solitary person—an eerie, edgy starkness that the purring of a feline companion cannot mute. The half-empty double bed becomes fertile soil for the sprouting of unwanted doubts, fears, memories. I know these creep up on many a restless insomniac as we close our eyes and hope for sleep to wash over us. Our stubborn brains refuse to set aside the marching drum and pick up the violin. However ... reaching out with hand or voice to confirm the reassuring presence of another would go a long way toward inviting peaceful thoughts to settle back in.

Tucked into my mother-in-law's Bible I find a hand-typed sheet with the heading, *Emergency Phone Numbers*. The ninth entry on this list reads: *When you are lonely and fearful...call Psalm 23*. I dial it up in my memory and sense the calming balm of God's presence.

Still, a trickle of anxiety continues its drip, drip, drip onto the tin hat of my nervous system. Entry number five: *When you want peace and rest...call Matthew 11:28-30*: "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

I slip the list into my bedside table drawer—my insurance policy for future episodes of distraught solitude. A few deep breaths help me pull up a mental image of my own version of The Peaceable Kingdom. Then I roll over and melt into my pillow.

I am truly not alone, after all.