

How I Came to Envy Country Mice

Read the text and do the multiple choice.

I have been living in London for more than 60 years, but still, when I'm driving and take some clever back-street short cut, I catch myself thinking: how extraordinary that it is me doing this! For a moment the town mouse I have become is being seen by the country mouse I used to be. And although, given a new start, I would again become a town mouse, when I visit relations in the country, I envy them.

Recently, I stood beside a freshwater lake in Norfolk, made by diverting a small river, near where my brother lives. As he was identifying some of the birds we could see, in came seven swans. They circled, then the haunting sound of their wing beats gave way to silence as they glided down for splashdown.

It is not a "picturesque" part of the coast, but it has a definite character of line and light and color. "You do live in a lovely place," I said to my brother, and he answered, "Yes, I do." There are probably few days when he does not pause to recognize its loveliness as he works with his boats - he teaches sailing - or goes about his many other occupations.

The lake's creator is a local landowner, continuing a tradition whereby the nature of our countryside has been determined by those who own the land. Formerly, landowners would almost certainly have made such changes for their own benefit, but this time it was done to help preserve the wildlife here, which is available for any visitor to see, providing they do nothing to disturb the birds. It is evidence of change: country life is changing fast.

One of the biggest changes I have witnessed is that second-homers, together with commuters, have come to be accepted as a vital part of the country scene. And the

men and women who service their cars, dig their gardens, install their phones, repair their word processors, lay their carpets and do all the other things they need are vital to modern country life.

It is quite likely that the children of today's workers may be moving into the same kind of jobs as the second-homers and the retired. Both the children of a country woman I know are at university, and she herself, now that they have left home, is working towards a university degree. One of the delights of country life today. It seems, is that there you can see how fast **social mobility** is increasing.

Much depends, of course, on the part of the countryside you are living in and on personality - your own and that of your neighbors. In my brother's Norfolk village, social life seems dizzying to a Londoner. In addition to dropping in on neighbors, people throw and attend parties far more often than we do. My brother's wife Mary and her friends fly off on the most dashing bargain breaks in Krakow or Prague or Venice, and are always going into Norwich for a concert or to King's Lynn for an exhibition. The boring country life that people from cities talk about is a thing of the past - or perhaps it was always mainly in their minds.

This is very unlike living in a London street for 50 years and only knowing the names of four other residents. In these 50 years I have made only one real friend among them. I do enjoy my life, and Mary says that she sometimes envies it (the grass on the other side of the fence ...); but whenever I go to Norfolk, I end up feeling that the lives of country mice are more admirable than my own.



1 It is sometimes a source of surprise to the writer

- A to find herself driving through back streets.
- B that she has been in the city for so long.
- C to realize how much she has got used to living in London.
- D that she lives in the city when she prefers the country.

2 The atmosphere created by the writer when she describes the swans

- A magical.
- B frightening.
- C deafening.
- D disturbing.

3 What does the writer's brother think of his village?

- A He thinks it is very picturesque.
- B He prefers the sea to the land.
- C He finds it dull and boring.
- D He is often struck by the beauty of the countryside.

4 What does "It" (highlighted in bold in paragraph 4) refer to?

- A the lake
- B the fact that the lake belongs to a landowner here.
- C the reason for the landowner's action.
- D the fact that wildlife now needs to be preserved.

5 What is suggested about outsiders who now live in the country?

- A that country people no longer reject them.
- B that they often do work like servicing cars and digging gardens.
- C that the men and women who work for them are from the city.
- D that many of them have been in the countryside for a long time.

6 What does "social mobility" (highlighted in bold in paragraph 6) mean?

- A Country people are going to university.
- B Young people are moving away from the countryside.
- C Children of country people are taking jobs in cities.
- D People from workers' families are moving into higher social classes.

7 Social life in the country

- A depends completely on where you live.
- B is not as boring as people in cities think it is.
- C is not affected by your neighbors.
- D is always less exciting than life in the city.

8 What do we learn about the writer's attitude to London?

- A She can't adjust to living in London.
- B She has regretted moving to London.
- C The people in her street are unusually unfriendly.
- D Life there is very different to country life.

