

Episode 35: The Quiet Folk  
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Practice silence to discover all the things that whisper.

Welcome to the CryptoNaturalist.

Hello Friends. It's been a spell since we last spoke. I hope you are doing well, fighting for social justice, wearing your mask in public, and supporting your friends and family through these unusual times. Cassandra and I are doing well. Winnebagoes don't typically catch human viruses and I have switched to being an exotherm as an added precaution. It hasn't been much of an inconvenience, except that I do need to bask in the sun for an hour or so each morning to get my body up and running.

I recently took a little break from studying cryptonature to make camp and focus on self-care. Some folks seem to think that taking a rest is a failing. Well, it's not true. Making camp and taking time to heal and marvel in the here and now is a vital part of any journey, not a departure from it. Don't go beating yourself up for slowing down and being safe right now. Lives have many seasons. Try to appreciate the one you're living in now.

That said, Cassandra and I were on the move again this week. We were both feeling a little restless, so we decided to travel for travel's sake, sticking to the backroads and byways and avoiding crowds.

I stopped to get Cassandra gas in a dusty rustbelt town that was deep in a cool, summer drought. An unusual combination.

I'm not entirely sure why Cassandra wanted the gasoline. She certainly doesn't use it for fuel, but I don't like to pry into the business of my friend, vehicle, and roommate. I ambled into the station to buy an emergency rain poncho and a few quarts of synthetic oil. The basics.

I walked around Cassandra looking for road ticks or lingering damage from a small hail storm that followed us for a few days in late June. Everything looked fine.

There was a dinnerplate sized moth the color of molasses obscuring my license plate, but I managed to coax it into a more felicitous spot just above a wheel well.

As I prepared to climb back inside, I spied an elderly fellow turning slow pirouettes on the tip of one shiny black shoe out at the edge of the parking lot. His other leg trailed behind like the tail of a kite in a slow-motion breeze. It was mesmerizing. It looked a bit like an underwater ballet, but the fellow doing the dancing looked utterly uninterested in his own performance.

I moved closer.

He whirled on, drifting here and there like a dust devil wandering some parched prairie. His face was tan and his mouth hung open in a dark “o.” Fine white hair danced above his scalp like mist on the surface of a pond. His eyes were the dark gray of sun-faded asphalt and moved to study me with each rotation in my direction.

“Hello,” I said. “That’s quite a talent for movement you have.”

He didn’t respond, but I thought his eyebrows rose a tad.

There was something out of step about the man. He was there, but he also wasn’t. At least he wasn’t there in the way he appeared. For one thing, he was completely silent. No scrape of shoe leather on concrete. No sounds of effort or breath. He was an image. Just an image. Like the ripple of light above a hot road.

“Well, I appreciate meeting you and seeing your fascinating movement. You have a good day now.”

Just because something isn’t really there doesn’t mean you can’t be friendly with it.

I moseyed on over to Casandra and asked her to take a look at the fella. She could see him as plainly as I could, but she couldn’t sense anything else. That’s very unusual for Casandra. She has a heck of a lot more senses than me, including four senses that are second cousin to smell, but with only the slightest family resemblance.

“let’s take a drive around this town,” I said. “I think it’s about time to put on the CryptoNaturalist hat again.”

Cassandra’s hat dispenser dispensed a new CryptoNaturalist hat with a pneumatic woosh.

I put it on.

Speaking of non sequiturs, how about a little poetry? It’s time for today’s hidden lore segment.

### **Hidden Lore:**

Today’s hidden lore is a poem by Olivia Williams.

“be not afraid”

The angel’s glacial halo shone quartz-white;  
its eyes were as a half-quenched magma flow  
sunk deep within its visage of pale snow;  
its two-edged sword of bluish diorite.  
I fell at its foot-hills until I heard  
its voice like rivers flowing from its mouths—  
basaltic, porous symphony of sounds  
creepingly metamorphosed into words:  
“I am the earth’s beginning and its end—  
what is, what was, and what someday shall be.”  
It laid a craggy weathered hand on me,  
its touch like the caress of a dear friend.  
The seismic voice a benediction made,  
ground-shattering and sweet: “Be not afraid.”

I love sonnets. I love geology. I love thinking of the landscape as a friend. So, of course, I love this poem.

Olivia Williams is a geology PhD student who uses ice to study our planet's ancient past. She writes short fiction, poetry, and all kinds of science stuff, but when she's not doing any of that you can find her in the woods looking for cool plants. Find more about her writing and research at [oliviawilliamsgeo.com](http://oliviawilliamsgeo.com).

I don't think I'll mention the name of the town we visited. I left there with quite a few unanswered questions, but one thing I know for certain. They did not crave tourism.

We drove down the main drag, past the diners, past the one-garage mechanic shop with tires stacked in the weedy parking lot, past the funeral parlor with the hand-painted sign, past the veterans' monument with its bronze soldier statue, past the antique store with the rocking horses in the window, down to the little town square with its patchwork of foxgloves and lilies. Peony and beebalm. It was a pretty little town and I counted two dozen silent, pirouetting figures on our drive to the square.

I decided to talk to the locals about the phenomenon.

I sat on a bench near a brick walkway. The bricks were etched with the names of companies that donated to maintain the square. I could hear the whirring gear hum of a mecha-shrew carving a path beneath a nearby flowerbed. It was an idyllic spot to spend an afternoon.

Twenty feet away, a silent woman in long red coat turned like a music box ballerina above a thick patch of dandelions. I noticed that her feet hadn't bothered to make contact with the ground.

A young woman with sky-blue hair traveled past and I asked if she had time to answer a couple questions. She did and I was grateful.

"That person there," I said, nodding at the spinning figure in red. "I noticed quite a few engaged in similar behavior around town. Can you tell me about them?"

She looked and then turned back to me with a quizzical look.

“That’s not a person,” she said. “That’s one of the quiet folks. You know, the quiet folks.”

I assured her that I did not know and she seemed to gather her energy in order to be extremely patient with me. In fairness to her, I believe I do require a fair amount of patience.

“The quiet folks. It’s a weather thing. Something to do with the heat and solar flares and string theory. You know. You’ll see them all over this time of year.”

I assured her that I had not seen them all over and she shrugged.

“Well, they’re a pretty basic weather thing.”

I couldn’t really think of a follow-up question to that, so I thanked her for her time.

I stopped a few other passers by and received much the same answers. The quiet folks are as common as heat lightning. It’s nothing to make a fuss over. I should have learned about them in elementary school science and so on and so on.

I asked one fella walking a beautiful Newfoundland Hound if the town ever got visitors specifically interested in the quiet folks. He became suddenly serious as scolded me for suggesting such an awful thing.

I finished the day with more close observations of the quiet folk. They cast shadows but didn’t seem to disturb the air around them. They would follow me with their eyes, but wouldn’t interact with me beyond that.

At one point I thought of passing my hand through one of the figures, but something stopped me. I can’t quite articulate it, but as I lifted my hand, I was absolutely certain it was wrong. Perhaps even dangerous. I’ve been doing this long enough to trust my instincts.

Well, anyway, the people I spoke with in that town were so insistent that the quiet folk were as commonplace as lizard fog and I’m not so foolish as to

automatically think I know better. So, listeners, if you're familiar with the quiet folk, do let me know, won't you?

Well now, we're getting short on time and I see we have a new field report. Let's you and me take a listen.

This is Paul Hogan transmitting on CryptoNaturalist frequency 11-58-1.

Eagle-eared listeners will know that this is my first transmission, so let me make one thing clear. No, this isn't the actor Paul Hogan. I hadn't seen or heard of the Crocodile Dundee movies until last Sunday. After watching them, I frankly don't understand the appeal of the films, but seeing them cleared up a lot of confusion I've had over the last few decades.

Yes, I lived in the Australian outback for some time. Yes, I carry a large knife. Yes, I occasionally indulge in lighthearted vigilante justice, but the similarities end there. It still doesn't explain why folks are so amused by my nickname, but let's move on.

I transmit today to talk about cormorants.

I've made a discovery while watching the double crested cormorants of Lake Erie. You likely know cormorants for their incredible diving skills, but I have new information. The bird that dives down is not always the bird that returns to the surface.

I first had this suspicion through noticing tiny variations in beak coloration. I confirmed my theory by marking individual birds using tiny cowboy hats and endless patience.

A behatted bird would dive. Some time later, a hatless bird would surface.

I have two working theories to explain this.

One: The cormorants have a massive, concealed, aquatic city deep beneath the great lakes. A place of learning and culture and unimaginable technology. Probably fish-themed architecture too.

Two: The hats are falling off underwater.

Obviously, it's far too early to make any conclusions, but I am launching a full investigation.

I send this transmission now incase my study proves to be more dangerous than I had hoped. Let's just pray that the cormorant civilization is less warlike than we land-walkers.

Wish me luck.

Paul “Hulk” Hogan, signing off.

Thank you, Paul. I hope you can make diplomatic inroads with the cormorant civilization. I would dearly love to visit such a place.

Let’s see, before we go, in CryptoNaturalist Community news, the radio I visited in the Adirondacks back in episode 31 has gone missing from its stump. Let’s hope it just decided to go for a wander. I’m sure its friends and family are eager to see it return to its mossy stump.

Looks like that’s all for now.

Remember.

We are all strange animals, so, act like it.

### **Show Notes: Episode 35: The Quiet Folk (00:18:35)**

#### **Credits**

**The quiet folk are there. Sort of. Let’s not call too much attention to them.**

Special thanks to Elliott Kalan for voicing Paul Hogan. I’ve been a fan of Elliott’s work for a long time. He was the head writer on The Daily Show with Jon Stewart, he was also the head writer on the new Mystery Science Theater 3,000. He also cohosts my favorite movie podcast, The Flop House. I recommend checking out his children’s books: *“Horse Meets Dog”* and, coming soon in September, *“Sharko and Hippo.”*

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You'll find information about submitting your poetry or prose for our hidden lore segments in the about section of our website at [CryptoNaturalist.com](http://CryptoNaturalist.com). The CryptoNaturalist is written and read by Jarod K. Anderson. Thanks to Adam Hurt for the use of his song Garfield's Blackberry Blossom from his album Insight. For more information on Adam's music, performances, and teaching, visit [adamhurt.com](http://adamhurt.com).