

A SUMMER DAY

Adult Prose Winner

by Richard Nye

The world seemed in perfect harmony. There was nothing in the countryside that didn't fit. The colours, the sounds, the smells, everything. The two friends made their way home drinking in the whole visual, aural and olfactory picture. The still air blended the singing of the hovering skylark with the gentle buzzing of bees during their traverse of the abundant elderflowers and occasional wild primrose. Even the slight hum of man's contribution to the scene in the form of a distant motorway somehow seemed to fit in. It was early summer and the initial fresh bright greens of the trees and hedgerows were starting to take on the darker more serious hues that would last until autumn signalled the next change of season.

"Lovely isn't it?" Beatrice said to her companion. She wasn't really asking a question, it was really an unnecessary remark, as she knew Belinda loved the countryside in exactly the same way as she did. Belinda agreed that this was a particularly beautiful day. They were both weary having been up working from first light but still had much to do that day. Their weariness did not blunt their senses however and they drank in the scene as they made their way home for a brief rest before starting out again for their work in the meadow. A rabbit scampered across the lane in front of them. It paused, looking around and appeared not to notice the two friends before its white cottontail disappeared into the long grass at the bottom of the hedge. Whilst at first light the rabbits were everywhere, they were fewer during the day preferring their burrow's cool darkness. Dusk saw them again in larger numbers. Perhaps they felt more exposed and vulnerable to Mr Fox in the bright light, Beatrice wondered. She was the opposite, loving the sun, its warmth and illumination of the landscape and its colours.

They started as a rush of sound disturbed their reverie. A car came roaring down the narrow country lane and suddenly the air was filled with a crescendo of noise. As suddenly as it came the noise disappeared into the distance leaving only a trail of exhaust fumes that hung in the air dispersing only slowly. Living in the country and working in the meadow and fields each day away from roads, made their sense of smell particularly acute. Occasionally their work took them near to the motorway and they were thankful that unlike those homes that were near to busy roads, they had only a minimal exposure to this abominable pollution.

Continued....

There was a flash of colour before their eyes. It was a Painted Lady butterfly alighting on a thistle, its proboscis probing the long purple florets. It seemed oblivious of the two friends as they passed by. Beatrice had previously noted particular species of butterflies and their larvae seemed to feed almost exclusively just on one type of flower. Red Admirals for example seemed to favour nettles above all others. What was it that thistles and nettles contained that could fulfil all the needs of these wonderful creatures? People wrote obscure PhD theses on such subjects. Somebody like Beatrice would certainly never find out.

Peace and harmony returned. Belinda's thoughts were wandering beyond butterflies, man's intrusions into nature and his polluting habits. "So what do you think of our new Queen then?" she ventured to Beatrice. The Queen had come to the throne just a few weeks before and she was the topic of everybody's conversation. Her accession was popular with all their friends. "I think she's just lovely" came the reply, "But what I just cannot stand are all those freeloaders who hang around her, they just live off the backs of everybody else". Belinda agreed "I know what you mean, all those men who do nothing all day but preen themselves, trying to look important, I really don't know why she puts up with it, but its always been like that you know".

Home was in sight now and they joined other workers returning with the fruits of their mornings work whilst others were leaving for the surrounding meadows and fields. A few drones lazed around outside the hive. The colony's beloved Queen, the mother to Beatrice and Belinda and thousands of their fellow workers, was busy inside laying eggs.