

Days like These

Richard paused in the centre of the pathway, letting the warm sunshine on this beautiful May morning, bathed his raised face. It was his favourite time of day, early morning before breakfast, before chores, before having the busy daytime thoughts crowd into his mind.

Rosie, his three-year-old Springer Spaniel worried round his feet urging him to move on, to continue the adventure. "All right girl" he chuckled "Have it your way" He carried on walking immersed in his surroundings, bright yellow gorse prickled on either side of the path, wild flowers, oxeye daisies, yellow rattle, red and white clover and the ubiquitous cow parsley all pushed their way valiantly into the light. He could hear the distinctive song of the skylarks as they flew exuberantly above him blissfully unaware of the human so far below. The hills of the Downs rose behind him gently undulating as they had for thousands of years.

In the distance he could see the trees in the woodland sporting their spring foliage, a bright fresh green which would soon become darker as the season changed to summer. To his left was a thin line of silver which shimmered in the sunlight. The sea. which marked the end of the Downs and indeed the end of England.

"What a perfect place we live in." he remarked to Rosie who was busy squeezing her lithe body under the gate which he was about to open. He rubbed his neat beard which now sported more grey than brown. "It's days like these that make your heart sing." he told her. As he strolled through the rustic gate into the meadow the tall grass on either side of the track swayed to and fro in the breeze like waves in an emerald ocean and his mind slipped back through the years to when he first brought Sylvie on this very walk. He was nervous not knowing if she would feel the same way about his county coming, as she did, from a metropolis in the north. He needn't have worried, as when he plucked up the courage to ask her if she could live somewhere like this she turned to him her lovely brown eyes becoming suddenly serious and she replied "Richard this is paradise, it's food for the soul." That was when he knelt on the grass and asked her to marry him.

"Yes, yes" she had shouted to the trees "yes" she shouted to the startled birds

"Oh yes darling Richard!" At that point she had danced away from him daring him to catch her so he chased after her his young heart full of joy.

To this day he remembered the overwhelming feeling of elation as he caught her and pressed her soft body to his. He felt as if he would burst with happiness. It was as if his life had begun at that moment. Rosie's sharp bark brought him back to the present. She had spotted a squirrel, had pursued it into the woods and watched with impotent rage as it scaled the nearest tree. Her furious barking increased as she circled the tree in a frenzy the squirrel taunting her from the safety of the lowest branches.

Richard called her back "Come here girl, evolution let you down, dogs aren't designed to climb trees."

They walked through the woodland together, Rosie snuffling at the undergrowth hoping for a ground living squirrel and picking up the scent messages left by other animals. The light was dappled in here, softer and cooler. The bluebell carpet not at its glorious best this late in the month. Autumn's leaves scrunched under his boots, a gold and brown reminder that nothing is forever but also in nature nothing is ever wasted they would break down eventually and give sustenance to new life. The sweetness of the air in the meadow gave way to a damp earthiness, not unpleasant but not as refreshing.

Richard's thoughts also turned darker as he contemplated loss and gaps left by loved ones. It is always said when someone is bereaved that 'life goes on' and so it does, of course it does, but it is never the same, cannot be the same, that person, that loved one has left a space in the world that will not be filled and it is the price that human beings pay for the wonderful inexplicable emotion called love. He suddenly felt tired and shaking himself called to the dog "Come on Rosie it's time to go home."

As he approached the little house at the end of the lane which led to his village he was thrilled to see his daughter Katie standing in the doorway, his grandson Will perched on her hip. "Hi Dad" she greeted him "Mum said you'd be home about now, how was your walk?" she paused to admonish the dog "Rosie get down now!" Richard followed her into the kitchen, and there turning towards him with a smile was his beautiful Sylvie looking, in his eyes, as young and vital as when he married her all those years ago, even though her thick chestnut hair was now streaked with silver.

"Today I must tell her" he thought as he folded her in a tender embrace. In all their years of marriage he had never kept anything from her but this news that he had tried to shield her from would hurt her more than

anything that had ever hurt her before just as it had rocked his world when the doctors had first told him that his time on Earth was more limited than he had believed. He thought back to his morning walk today, how many more walks would he have? How many more inspiring encounters with the countryside would be allowed him? How many more conversations with his wife and daughter would amuse and delight him? He suddenly decided that he would not dwell on the future, life was for living and for however long the gods decided to give him, he would make every day every hour and every second count.

With a heavy heart he sat at the oak table and said "Sylvie, Katie please sit down I have something to tell you."