

## There comes a morning

Past me, as I cycled up to Chelford roundabout, there rolled an endless series of wheeled prisons. Out of each one stared a sad (seasonally affected disgruntlement?) driver. The long stream of rush-hour cars grumbled on in turn, as if repeating a grim chant. The drivers were all carefully isolated from the winter, which from inside their cars looked very grey and dank to them. It was quite grey even to me on my bike, though there was a subtle freshness to it that made me glad I was warmly wrapped. Some people say they like the winter, though as Richard Adams (of *Watership Down* fame) astutely noted, what most of us actually like is feeling proof against it.

But the world looks different from a bicycle: because on a bike, it is earlier than for any car-driver that there comes a certain *morning*. In early spring, before the human world notices, a long series of dark, wet mornings is followed by something strange, almost alien – a calm dry one. Around the end of January, not long after dawn, the wild world suddenly wakes up wide. The tits singing at the roadside are convincing, now. The cock pheasants imitating molehills in the field are suddenly up and glaring at each other. Snowdrops open in roadside garden edges. From underneath the brown hedgerow flotsam, left from the last cloudburst, larger green things appear, looking trim and ready for growth. And, belatedly, like a late adopted child, from my bike saddle I notice it, too. There comes a morning: the first of spring.

On that morning, one looks for the special things. Above the first of the long grass by one of the Chelford sand quarries, I glimpsed something. Was it? Could it really be? Small, fast flickering black wings, two pairs, not associated with sound yet (even in traffic gaps) – but for just a few seconds *not going anywhere*. There are only two birds in the sky that go nowhere: the wind-hovering kestrel . . . and the skylark. Not singing yet, until the sun comes out long after I have passed on in the grey morning. But hovering ready and soon . . .

The cars grumble on. How infuriating is the sound of the internal combustion engine! Endless noise was still going round the circle of the Chelford roundabout far behind me. Thrown as if by centrifugal force, the cars roared away from it towards me. Standing, waiting for a gap to hear the countryside singing to itself, one lets the first two or three cars pass pleasantly. Oh, they're only earning a living – keeping the kids safe – possibly a mission of mercy, even – one grants them their passage . . . then as each grumble fades, *just* before silence falls, the next begins. By the time it reaches ten or twelve, one's mood has changed from green to red. The next one deserves a clod on his or her windscreen, to match the clot behind it! And so the world never stops overheating.

Some things hurry not. Abruptly, a buzzard soars low over me – oh, how impressive, but the *laziest* of birds! – almost rigid until half-way across the “hare” meadow (no March hares there yet), when the local crow takes umbrage. It starts an aerial bombardment – the battle of midway across the field. For spring is not about peace: the world demands action. And the human race alone can provide it for the world,

now, if we can find enough faith and love. In the midst of lamentations even of Biblical scale, we must believe they are new every morning. And surely they can be – especially on this one.