

THE SPRING PATH

We each had a sixpence, shiny and new,
My sister and I.
Pocket-money multiplied sixfold,
Wealth to be squandered on a shopping spree.

Peach's Store was two miles away
In Upper Bucklebury.

Our path was narrow, stony,
Scary dark between high hedges at first.
Tiny pink wood-sorrel and delicate windflowers
Grew by the stream that wandered lazily
To Goodenough's duckpond where tiddlers swam.
Deep in a holly bush, sharp, glossy green,
A dunnoek sat statue-still on four blue eggs
Safe in their hair-lined nest.

The path rose steeply where Blind John's spring was hidden,
To us forbidden, my sister and I,
Under a rotting lid among the blackthorns.
Its water, clear and icy cold
Was hauled by fathers at sunrise into shining buckets,
And carried, splashing, on oaken yokes
To cottages shaggy with thatch
And dim behind leaded panes.
Here mothers chopped the wood,
Lighted the fire,
Woke the children
And used the water with parsimony.

Above the nook where the spring lay hid
Spread the Berkshire Downs;
Common land where sheep grazed contentedly,
Bilberry carpeted beneath bracken and gorse
In which linnets nested and adders lurked.

The path widened, smooth and dry
Through the spinney of silver birch
Which led to the lane, to the shop,
And to large, smartly aproned Mrs Peach
Smiling. How loudly she talked!
Her sherbet fountains and fairy whispers cost a penny.
Sixpence bought a feast for the journey home.

A.M.Harrison
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