



A rendezvous with the posh lady



Prior to lockdown I hadn't really given much attention or thoughts to the outdoors or nature until late last summer when one afternoon I visited my mate's allotment in Harborne, an area in south-west Birmingham. To be honest, I was a tad sceptical at first as I thought it was one of those pursuits only middle class people enjoyed. Images of the 1970s sitcom: *The Good Life* and the actress Felicity Kendal flashed across my mind but I took the plunge into 'polite society' and went on a wander down to Kev's allotment. At once I started to notice the little red-breasted robins perched on a little bough puffing out their chests in defiance of any territorial intruders. I heard the song thrushes and slowly became curious of the magpies that surrounded us. As the sun rose, I could feel its warmth on my back so I pulled a chair out, sat down and lit a up a smoke then Kev poured us both a drink. I really looked forward to my visits there, but it was so far away?

As summer turned into autumn, the nights seemed to draw to a close far too early and so my visits became less frequent.

Then one day I passed my local allotment site. It was one of those places you could pass by every day and not pay too much attention as you're going about your business, a rather inconspicuous place, and so I halted at the notice board and read there was a waiting list for plots so I took the details down and applied to go on their waiting list.

Some months later I received an email asking if I still wanted a plot and if so I was to make contact with them. I rang the number and spoke to a rather posh and charming lady who invited me round to view the site. Well of course, I was delighted with this invitation yet I remained a little cautious and reticent. Doubts were beginning to set in.

Am I doing the right thing? I wondered. Am I ready for this? Sipping latte with the chattering classes?



It was now winter and lockdown was taking its toll. Empty bottles and cans were becoming my sole contribution to the cause of recycling. I had to act fast. Merely subscribing to the Guardian and joining Extinction Rebellion or getting on a bike to go avocado-munching at Sainsbury's was not really my cup of latte - yet I was only getting an allotment. It was hardly subversive. What could go wrong?

On the following Sunday we agreed to rendezvous. I met Julie, the posh contact, at the appointed time of ten o'clock in the morning. It was a drab wintery morning and rather cold. At first sight it wasn't much to look at. A swampy bed of weeds with a dilapidated shed that seemed like it could collapse at any given moment if it wasn't full of junk. Despite this, there remained lots of potential. It would make a great place to 'chill out' where I could invite some mates round to play the bongo and perhaps have a barbecue with liquid refreshments and some UB40. Unfortunately that idea was soon dispelled after the posh lady said it was "against the rules" in her distinctive and refined accent. Against the rules?! I thought. What sort of bourgeois nonsense is this? Seeds of doubts were beginning to take root.

But all was not lost.....to my pleasant surprise I discovered that the Irish Centre was across the road, a mere 5 minute stroll away, so I immediately agreed to take the plot. I'm enjoying the outdoor life and am writing again too. The allotment has been a source of light, personal growth and poetic inspiration for getting closer to nature which gives one a flicker of hope during these challenging times. I will leave you with this poem I penned during the winter lockdown.





'Tis a Cold Winter's Morning

'Tis a cold winter's morning that greets the eye

Shrouded in hazy mist
I plod on without a sigh
As the foggy mist sets adrift

The damp soil makes for easy work
Tending my plot with spade and fork
'Tis indeed a labour's love I toil
Digging and turning the soil

Pausing I spot a fleeting visitor
With a chest of orange red colour
Perched upon a sapling bough
He's come to watch me plough

And though wintery days are short
I'm filled with festive thought
Oh what joy when work is such play
For the robin has joined me today!

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