

Bourne
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Untitled

by Janie Reynolds

A young woman was lying on the beach getting a glorious suntan, when an old barefooted lady, wearing a long bright cotton shawl, stopped and peered down at her as she lay on the sand.

“Are you enjoying yourself?” she asked.

Startled by the interruption, the young woman looked up at her but saw a smiling, gentle face.

“Yes, thank you,” she replied, “I’m just soaking up the sun.”

Nodding, the old lady agreed, “the sun is very good for you isn’t it?” she said.

The young woman, sat up to address the older woman, feeling it was rude to remain on her back.

“Yes,” she said, “I only like the way I look when I have a tan. I’m a horrible ugly white otherwise.”

“So what have you given the sun in return for all your beauty?” asked the elder woman. But the young woman didn’t understand what she meant and so the old lady in the shawl went on her way.

Soon, she came across a couple of lovers, sitting on the sandy beach, enjoying the cool breeze that came from the sea.

She stopped and greeted them both and then asked if they were enjoying themselves.

“Yes,” they said, their eyes sparking with passion, “it’s such a relief to come here where the wind cools us down. It’s so hot in the town!”

“So what have you given the breeze, in return for the relief it has given to you?” asked the old lady. But the couple looked at her as though she were crazy and she went on her way.

Next she came to a man who was walking slowly through a forest, lost in his thoughts.

“Hello,” she said, “are you enjoying yourself?”

The man, his face pensive and alive, replied, “I love it here in the woods amongst the trees and the rustling leaves. I get such great ideas here.”

“And what have you given the forest in return for such inspiration?” asked the elderly woman. But the man looked startled, as if he thought her rude to ask, so she went on her way.

Lastly, she came upon an old man, kneeling by the side of a lake, staring down into the water.

“Hello,” she said, “are you enjoying yourself?”

“Not exactly enjoying,” he said, “I have come here to try and find some calm in a crazy world. The water here is so still. It reflects back at me the stupidity of my never ending worry.”

“So have you given anything back to the lake over your many years, in return for this stillness of mind?” asked the old woman. But the man’s eyes looked empty and he didn’t say a word, so she went on her way.

A few years later disaster struck the earth. Forests and fields burned to the ground through lack of protection by man. The seas became polluted by human rubbish and most species were destroyed decimating the ecosystem. The lakes dried up from soaring temperatures and there was little for anything to drink. Only a few lucky ones survived to tell the tale and I am one.

We’ve rebuilt our lives but, this time, with respect for nature. We don’t see mother earth as there only to provide for us, while never thanking her for all she gives. If we did she wouldn’t survive and nor would we. We have all learned our lesson the hard way.

So these days, though I like a view, I sit with my back to it. It’s a mark of respect. It knows I don’t have eyes in the back of my head, so, by showing my back, I’m saying we’re even. I try to stay as vulnerable as the view is. For it knows what we humans are like and as quickly as I can draw my scythe, it can blow me away on a sudden gust of wind, or crack beneath my feet and let me fall to my death.

The fields of green still roll but without my eyes pinning them down. The grey-blue English waves still crash on the pebbles, but they're not doing so for me to feel better. I still sense the view is there but I let it cast its shadows on my back without me knowing and I give it the space to dance naked when I'm not looking.