

## Bank Holiday

by Sue Hitchcock

The Sunday before the bank holiday. No work today, so cars are lined up, nose to tail, on both sides of the street. The terrace houses are only as wide as a car is long, so who knows where two car households park their second vehicle? There are only a few who do not drive.

The wind is blowing, as usual from the east, up the hill from the seafront and the air smells clean, despite Eastbourne's reputation for having high air pollution. The dog walkers have wandered down to the park much earlier and all is quiet. The wild flowers seem to like it – it has been a spectacular Spring. They have put the garden flowers to shame, creeping along the gutter, protected from footfall by the cars, enjoying the nook between pavement and wall and sneaking along the path to the front doors. Most stunning is the blue campanula with so many flowers the leaves are hidden. How on earth does it climb up walls? Next to it, disguised as a daisy, is an erigeron from North Africa. It outnumbers our native daisy, at least hereabouts. Cranesbill, the wild version of geranium gives us some pink, while scarlet pimpernel and wood sorrel, yellow with brown, clover-like leaves complete the palette. Tall plants draw too much attention to themselves. Will the poppies (red), alkanet (blue) and hawkweed (yellow) survive the tidy housekeeper?

It is too nice a day to stay indoors and the men come out to wash their cars. First our neighbour to one side. He has a neat, little car, two-toned, with a black roof and coffee-coloured body. It suits him, dapper and bearded, and he makes a quick, neat job of it. Next our neighbour from the other side emerges. He has a son, taller than his dad and they lark around a bit. Sometimes the son wears an army cadet uniform and his father looks very proud of him. I wonder if the father was in the army previously. He works from home now. On work days the family sets out on the dot of ten to eight, mum delivered to the hospital for her regular shift and the son to school. The only time I see the wife is when they smoke together in the back garden, even in the rain. She should know better.

I hear her hawking horribly in the morning, but maybe it's a choice between her health and their relationship.

The wife of the dapper man also spends most of her life at home. They have a sickly bulldog. Its compressed nose gives it breathing problems, which sometimes leaves it barking on every breath. It never goes out. When the woman goes out, it throws itself continually at the door of the room it is shut into, sounding like demolition.

Now my husband coughs, but it isn't caused by pollution. Still, breathing should be a priority and I can't wait for the end of cars, an end to pollution.