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A Midsummer Spell

by Leanne McClements

I used to wear white fairy wings and wish for many things.
I wished school would close early so I could play in the fields.
When the first heatwave hit, we went home early
three days in a row. My friends climbed into
air-conditioned cars and I began to wish instead
that I didn't have to cycle home.
Did I make this happen, I asked Mum.
She said we all made it happen.
We drank water thirstily before setting off.
Mum told me it was too hot to play outside.

Our new route was long and boring.
Spring had clung to the undersides of fresh leaves,
cool, damp and hidden.
Now midsummer flashed off car windscreens,
and I noticed for the first time
the sun-baked roadside verges either side of us.
Cabbage White butterflies danced like fairies
over wildflowers, twining around each other
in an updraft of aerial ballet,
racing us down the path.

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Mum began to shout names,
one after another,
flinging them behind her for me to catch.
The butterflies were everywhere, feeding on
the rich purple thistle-heads of Common Knapweed
and Common Ragwort's bright yellow clusters.
Field Bindweed spilled its little trumpets onto the path
like a dropped bag of pink-and-white-striped candies,
and Herb Robert flushed with red,
but by then I didn't care about the heat.

I was freewheeling down the hill,
the warm breeze flapping my top into white wings.
Dark green stinging nettles and the
frothy umbrellas of Cow Parsley whizzed by,
and I began to shout their names, too.
Yes, Mum shouted back. Magic!
Later, when it was too hot to sleep, I asked what she meant.
Every spell begins with a name, she replied.
That night I dreamed I was a butterfly, my wings
stirring the sunless air and cooling the flowers.



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