

## A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE MORNING By CANNY SHOOTER

It was a beautiful and invigorating morning as Andrew Kerr, a hard working farmer, drove his quad bike over the rough ground towards his flock of sheep in one of his fields. The sun flickered in the still bare branches of the wooded copse in front of him and he felt almost happy despite the troubles which had recently beset his farm. Financial stability had been hard to achieve, though the planting of half an acre of woodland for wildlife had earned him a grudging sum of money from the government and the large windmill behind the wood, which he named the Milliband Marauder, had added to his income. The wooded area with its strategically placed fast growing lime trees and Dawn Redwood served to shield the view of the windmill from the farmhouse and crows and magpies could be dealt with if these predators became too numerous and threatened the small song birds which Andrew wanted to flourish.

All very well, but a larger problem hung over the farm like a dark cloud from Hell. A pair of white tailed eagles had made the field of sheep their hunting ground and came on regular visits now that the lambing season was in full swing. This morning was no exception. As the farmer neared his destination to oversee his flock, the sheep were milling around in panic and the largest sea eagle Andrew had ever seen was perched over one of his precious lambs which was lying on its back and struggling to get free. It stood no chance. The predator had ripped open its underside and was feeding on the lamb's entrails while it was still alive. The other smaller bird stood patiently nearby, waiting for its turn.

Andrew accelerated his quad bike towards the field as both birds flew off, the larger trailing two or three yards of intestines from its curved beak. His vehicle stopped about twenty yards from the stricken lamb and Andrew took his shotgun from the back of the quad and sorrowfully had to shoot the young lamb to put it out of its agony. What happened next horrified the farmer and made him feel sick. The larger of the two eagles returned to the field and landed twenty yards from Andrew who was trying to clear up the remains. It was a huge bird with a wingspan of twelve feet or more and audaciously eyed up its human adversity as Andrew raised his shotgun to aim at its head. The standoff lasted a full minute but the irate farmer decided that this was not the moment and a well deserved load of lead to the head would not be worth the trouble it would cause. He returned to his quad bike and drove slowly and carefully at his enemy but the bird flew away in the direction of the wooded copse leaving Andrew enraged and shaken.

At home, that evening, Andrew discussed the situation with Matilda, his wife, after the children had gone to bed. "I was prepared to shoot the creature but common sense stopped me," he said. "I know that man is the top predator but in this modern world, there are even greater predators on the likes of you and me."

"I know what you mean," sighed Matilda. "It's the wildlife fanatics who control the dead hand of bureaucracy and common sense flies out the window."

"Dead right." Andrew sniffed in disgust. "I could be heavily fined or even sent to prison. We could lose the farm and our livelihood."

"We could lose our livelihood if you don't do something," countered Matilda. "Why don't you confront it again tomorrow? These creatures always come back after an easy kill."

“I’ll think of something. You’ll see.” Said Andrew firmly.

Next morning, Andrew set out on his daily routine to feed his sheep with murder on his mind. He approached the place where his flock congregated but everything was tranquil. High above he could see the lesser eagle circulating but unwilling to descend. As his trusty quad bike approached its destination, he could see his windmill more clearly and below it, the outline of the larger eagle. It did not move as he approached and it showed a large gash across its side, leaving it fatally wounded. The blades of the windmill turned high above it and Andrew knew the beast had been hit by one of the blades.

It was with quiet satisfaction that he returned to the house that day and told Matilda what had happened and they celebrated with a small sherry. “I’ll move the sheep pen and troughs from their present position to underneath the windmill as soon as possible.” Andrew told her. “It may not work but at least it will be worth a try.”

“For the sake of our lambs...and for the sake of our young children.” Added his wife.

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