

Nettles by Richard Swan



*Who could love a nettle?
Great hulking, stinging things
Stomping along the riverbank,
Stopping us reaching the water.
If we approach they bare their teeth,
Bite at our ankles.
They squat there; we stay here.
A stand-off.*

*Who could love a butterfly?
Shards of white light, flit-flitting
Round our paths,
Teasing our footsteps,
Tempting us forward,
Laughing in the sun.*

*Ah, says the butterfly,
When I was young,
Before I changed my shape
And grew these wings you love,
Nettles were all my life.
I was born in nettles,
I ate them every day,
Growing and eating, growing and eating,
While you marched past uncaring.
The beauty of nettles! Green of the spring,
Soft as the breeze, gentle in my jaws.
These wings of mine
Were born in the veins of the nettles.
Love them too.*