
Grandmother Milkweed and Simon Snail

~ Andy Ward

Here is a brief nature story written after an inspiring weekend workshop at the Nature Institute in Harlemville, NY. The story arose out of several hours spent observing a big milkweed patch on both a sunny and rainy day to support and strengthen the children's trust in life. Rudolf Steiner's observation about butterflies being flying flowers blended into the story. From there, the story grew into a puppet play. This story is an example of how Mother Nature encourages us in many ways through many voices.

*On a sunny day in mid-summer,
the milkweed patch is in full bloom.
And on the growing point
bursting spheres of buds
open to invite all
to join the festivities.
Summer breezes
bear the heavenly fragrance
of milkweed flowers,
calling to the flying ones
of the upper story.
Drunken bumblebees,
flitting butterflies,
and other floating members
of the Merry Buzzing Airborne Band
feast on the sweet nectar.
Oh, Happy Day!
Grandmother Milkweed has returned
from her long winter nap.*

The next day was cool and rainy in the milkweed patch. Grandmother Milkweed enjoyed the quiet, as raindrops splashed onto her broad green leaves and streamed down her thick stems into the ground. She sighed happily. Most of the winged crowd were taking a day of rest in this weather—the butterflies couldn't navigate so well in the rain, the bumblebees were much too furry and wet to fly about, and even the beetles were slipping on the rainy leaves.

"But, oh, who is tickling me?" she asked. "Why, it's little Simon Snail. He must be very happy to be out on this rainy day." And Grandmother Milkweed was right!

*Slowly, slowly,
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly*

*he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

Yes, Simon Snail was very happy indeed. He was a silent little fellow and liked to take his time, without all the rushing about of the ants, beetles, and the fluttering and buzzing of the airy crowd. It was so still and peaceful today. He loved the peace and quiet of Grandmother's roots, but he wondered about those who lived high above in the air and light.

"Good morning, Simon," said Grandmother.

"Good morning, Grandmother Milkweed," Simon replied to her greeting. "I have been wondering—can flowers fly? I want to see the flowers that were flying about yesterday when the sun was shining. But where are they today?"

"Well, dear boy," she said, "they are resting today, but if you come back tomorrow when the sun is shining again, you will see them. And you can ask them all your questions yourself."

The next day Simon started out very early in the morning.

*Slowly, slowly,
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly,
he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

The milkweed patch was shady and cool down below, but up above the sun was shining, and Simon could



see the flying flowers. So many colors! He climbed and he climbed, farther than he had ever climbed before, leaving his silvery trail behind.

High above, Grandmother Milkweed's flowers bloomed, and their lovely scent filled the air. Simon had never smelled such a sweet fragrance. He licked the drops on the broad, green leaves and even the raindrops tasted sweet. At last, he was up in the world of light.

The furry bumblebees bumbled about, drinking nectar from the flowers, when suddenly, a dainty creature with huge orange wings fluttered down near Simon. She held onto the flower with her front legs, and said, "Well, Good morning! Who are you?"

"I am Simon Snail. Are you a flower?"

"Why no, I'm a butterfly. The People call me Monarch."

"That's a beautiful name," said Simon. "Like a Queen! What are you doing?"

"I am drinking sweet nectar from the milkweed flowers. Would you like to taste some?"

"Yes!" said Simon.

"Then here you go! Catch!" And she shook her wings. All the tiny pink flowers shivered, and a burst of nectar-drops landed all around Simon. He had never tasted anything so sweet and delicious!



Illustration by Jo Valens from *Tell Me Another Story* (WECAN, 2019)

"Thank you so much," he called, as the Monarch fluttered off to the next flower.

"Come visit me again, little friend," she called.

*Slowly, slowly.
oh so slow.
Slowly, slowly,
he will go.
Silvery trail
behind him, so.*

Simon began the long trip back down Grandmother Milkweed's strong stem. He was much refreshed from the nectar, and full of wonder after his visit with the butterfly. At last, Simon was home, down in the cool, wet soil. "It's dark and quiet down here. I'm glad to be home!" He paused and looked around. "But what an adventure. I am going to tell all my friends about the flying flowers and the Monarch Queen, who shared sweet nectar with me. And I will visit her again. I wonder what stories she has to tell!"

And Grandmother Milkweed smiled and smiled. Such a fine day for all her children. ♦

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