

## *Early April*

*It is brilliant sunshine, seven o'clock, and a very frosty morning. Driving up the moor road, I take extra care where the run-off water from the fields has frozen into solid patches of ice. Icicles fringe the waterfalls, looking like ogre's teeth in the black mouths of the peat hags.*

*A phone call from a local farmer's wife during the last week alerted me that the blackcock are beginning to gather at their traditional lekking site, so I'm going over this moor to reach the next dale, then up again, and into another remote valley. A lek is where the male blackcocks vie against one another for females, testing their strength and prowess.*

*Until now I've taken you to the high land above my home, and further along to the west. The whole of the Yorkshire Dales area can be regarded as a series of valleys divided by wide strips of moorland, or conversely, as vast rolling majestic moors, gouged out by valleys. Living as we do in the comparatively sheltered lowlands, we are inclined to think in terms of the former, but the more I explore the moor, the more I understand it to be the latter.*





*Arriving on this bleak, grassy, seemingly featureless tract of land, I wrap up very well before embarking on a slow climb. Following the track up and leaving the narrow well-gritted road behind me, I disturb a pair of lapwings. One of them continues to stand boldly, bearing his windswept plume with pride.*

*A skylark soars, singing his heart out before returning in a single dive to join his mate perching on a rocky outcrop.*

