

In My Garden, January

Snowy, Flowy, Blowy,
Showery, Flowery, Bowery,
Hoppy, Croppy, Droppy,
Breezy, Sneezy, Freezy

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2016 is over. By Twelfth Night, the Christmas tree, once so longed for and cherished, had been discarded in a spectacular cascade of dropped needles out on to the patio on its way to the bonfire. Decorations packed away in the loft for another year. Part of the Christmas cake is still remaining in its tin, a stump of white, yellow and brown stickiness. The least desired chocolates still uneaten, the soft orange, strawberry and coffee creams, and a handful of nuts, almonds that had been too hard to crack. The final dregs of Christmas as festivities conclude and normality returns; with excitement and optimism we embark on another year.

Winter is not everyone's favourite season, constantly we ruminate back to last summer and dream about the spring time yet to come. Why not be less depressed and anxious? Embrace the now! Seasonal mindfulness; take a detailed interest in the smallest flower, in seed heads, in bark, the forms of bare trees against the sky, winter sunshine on a cat's fur making it exquisitely silky; tiny minute differences that significantly change in the garden every day. Magnificence in the muddiness and cold.

A moth orchid, a Phalaenopsis, inherited from an ex-partner finally went on the compost after I became too bored with its sickly pink continuous succession of blooms. Orchids are now so very common place and disposable. When I started my first full time employment after leaving college I was working at an orchid nursery on a private estate. However, my employment commenced on 19th October 1987, Black Monday, when all the stock markets crashed. For any one living in the south-east it was more memorable for being only three days after the Great Storm. I scarcely saw an orchid for the first six months I was there; handed a chainsaw on my arrival that was what I did the remaining autumn through winter and into spring. The pheasant shoot took priority over everything else on that estate and access was vital to the feeding pens and drives needed clearing to enable the beaters to work their dogs. Thirty years ago the cheapest we could grow these Phalaenopsis for was about £17.50. Today, for a fiver, sometimes less you can purchase one as they are churned out en masse for sale to any supermarket or petrol station. Only a few decades before this these plants were held in such high reverence, only for the wealthy enthusiast, exotic beauties they would almost only ever be watered from a gold watering can on a certain phase of the moon. Today Phalaenopsis, Cymbidiums and Dendrobiums can be purchased cheaper than a bunch of flowers.

I dearly loved autumn, the dead flower heads and seed pods of teasels and hogweeds, sunflowers and old man's beard; the dying year's beautiful souvenirs of sunnier times. However, I am impatient and by the solstice in December, the official start of winter, I yearn only for signs of spring. Not the full blown vernal tulips and apple blossom but subtle swelling buds and green shoots of recovery that give so much heart and cheer and encouragement on dank winter days. Unfurling leaves on wild arum, Narcissus poking through the soil, winter cyclamen on the cusp of flowering, snowdrops too and Hellebores, all promising their displays. The Earth's begun tilting forward and how ever midget the differences are the days *will* be getting longer; fashions for dried lifeless stems becoming obsolete and so last season; what I now crave for is life and hope.