

In My Garden, January.

...We live, we love, we woo, we wed,
We wreath our brides, we sheet our dead.

We laugh, we weep, we hope, we fear,
And that's the burden of the year.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX

'Alexandre Girault' is a vigorous cerise-pink rambler rose with a perfume of overly sweet ripe red apples. In three years a cutting has quickly outgrown its position in my rose garden, it is too feral looking to be grown so formally, it really needs to be growing up into a tree.

Four years ago I saw this cerise-pink rose growing in a semi-derelict garden in Barnstable. It sprawled about neither bush nor really climbing, lax growth, glossy rounded leaves, charming flowers hanging along the stems, some in clusters whilst others singularly. Fascinated I thought it unusual and very attractive too, I knew it was far from being a regular climbing rose. Whatever the rose was it was highly desirable...

At the time I was having great difficulties slowly recovered from a serious mental breakdown. Early one dark November morning switching on the radio in the kitchen there were such horrors, a terrorist attack, gruesome details, tragically all too frequent, I couldn't listen anymore as I was in real danger of plunging back into my darkest pit. Try to do something positive and uplifting to change your thought patterns. Reclaim back the day.

So I marched straight up the road, boarded the 5b bus and within the hour was walking past the house where the rose grew. How it poured with rain that day. Conveniently there were stems hanging out from trees dangling down into to the street. Lightning quick as a gun slinger I drew the pair of secateurs my hand was resting on from my pocket; snip, snip, snip. Hand back in pocket, cuttings tucked inside my coat. At a safe distance from the crime scene I covered the stems in previously dampened kitchen towel, wrapping them in a plastic bag I caught the next bus home. You can tell I had done this before!

I planted the cuttings, four in total, pencil thickness and 20cm long into very gritty compost into one of those deep long pots that roses or Clematis are often sold growing in. The following spring three cuttings failed, however one rooted and grew splendidly. Burgeoning so spectacularly that by June I was able to plant it into the previous position in the rose garden. A number of years ago a very kind lady in the village donated me a plant of Cotinus coggygria 'Royal Purple' from her garden. The purple leaved smokebush enjoys my growing conditions, planted near to the top of the garden it has reached a height of 4 metres and the same in width during the last ten years.

New year's day was moving day. I dug a decent sized hole as close as possible to the trunk of the Cotinus being mindful not to damage any major roots. The rose came out with a goodly amount of soil adhering to it, in fact so little had I disturbed its root system that I decided that none of the top growth needed pruning. After planting and watering-in sufficiently I spread the stems tying them in to the branches of the Cotinus, fanning them out equally to cover as much of the bush as possible.

In due course I read and heard about the hideous killings in Paris. Nowadays with my head and mind in a much better place I can process such events like these with a proper sense of proportion, they won't instantly force me down into a deep and dark depression anymore.

As for the rose, its cheerfully bright pink flowers will contrast perfectly against the purplish maroons of the smokebush and when the rose is not in flower it will be hidden amongst its leaves. I cannot wait to see them growing together and putting on their displays, I'm very excited and positive about the year ahead.