



# Kathy's Garden: Coping with the November Garden

**G**ardening is a peculiar combination of extravagant hopefulness & prosaic mucking about with shovels & mixtures of things that would suit the alchemists or MacBeth's three witches. Never is this paradoxical blend of passion & bat guano quite so evident as in November. It may not yet have rained enough to refresh the last pallid roses or moisten the new seedbeds; the brilliant turn of the leaves may not quite have climaxed, but there is the gardener, eyes focused somewhere towards spring, spreading compost, hacking old raspberry canes, inwardly counting over the past year's glories & griefs, certain that the next year will bring only glory.

Sometimes in November I look at the gardens with focused eyes & momentary shock. Heavens—the beautiful musk roses stopped blooming months ago, didn't they? Everything is dry & faded, save the brave & brilliant leaves of the persimmon tree. The lilies, sprawled this way & that, are dying down in sad yellow tatters. The deer have eaten the pretty heart shaped leaves of all the violets. The turkeys have nibbled the primroses. The dogs have lain comfortably in the lavender, and something with very large teeth has nibbled the fish emulsion container & sprawled in the raspberries. We saw a bear & her cub the other night on the long dirt road...

**Perhaps I should take up tole painting instead.**

Except, in November, the garden is in the mysterious new beginnings. Roots are stirring. There is still time to plant bulbs, to divide clumps of overgrown perennials, to take cuttings and to beg for starts & cuttings from friends. Be bold as you plant and

generous as you give away. I have had great success just breaking off likely bits of plants & sticking them into the ground (remember to water your plants in the making if the rains haven't begun); if you are of a chemical & scientific frame of mind you can use rooting powders available at your local nursery.

*Hydrangeas, roses, buddleia, lavender, sage, rock roses, mock orange, penstemons & fuchsias* are all fairly eager to grow from cuttings six to ten inches long. Actually, I don't measure—but don't those numbers add an air of authority? *Geraniums* are also very easy but frost tender, though the rose scented sort survives well to about 20 degrees; you may wish to make cuttings for sunny windows now.

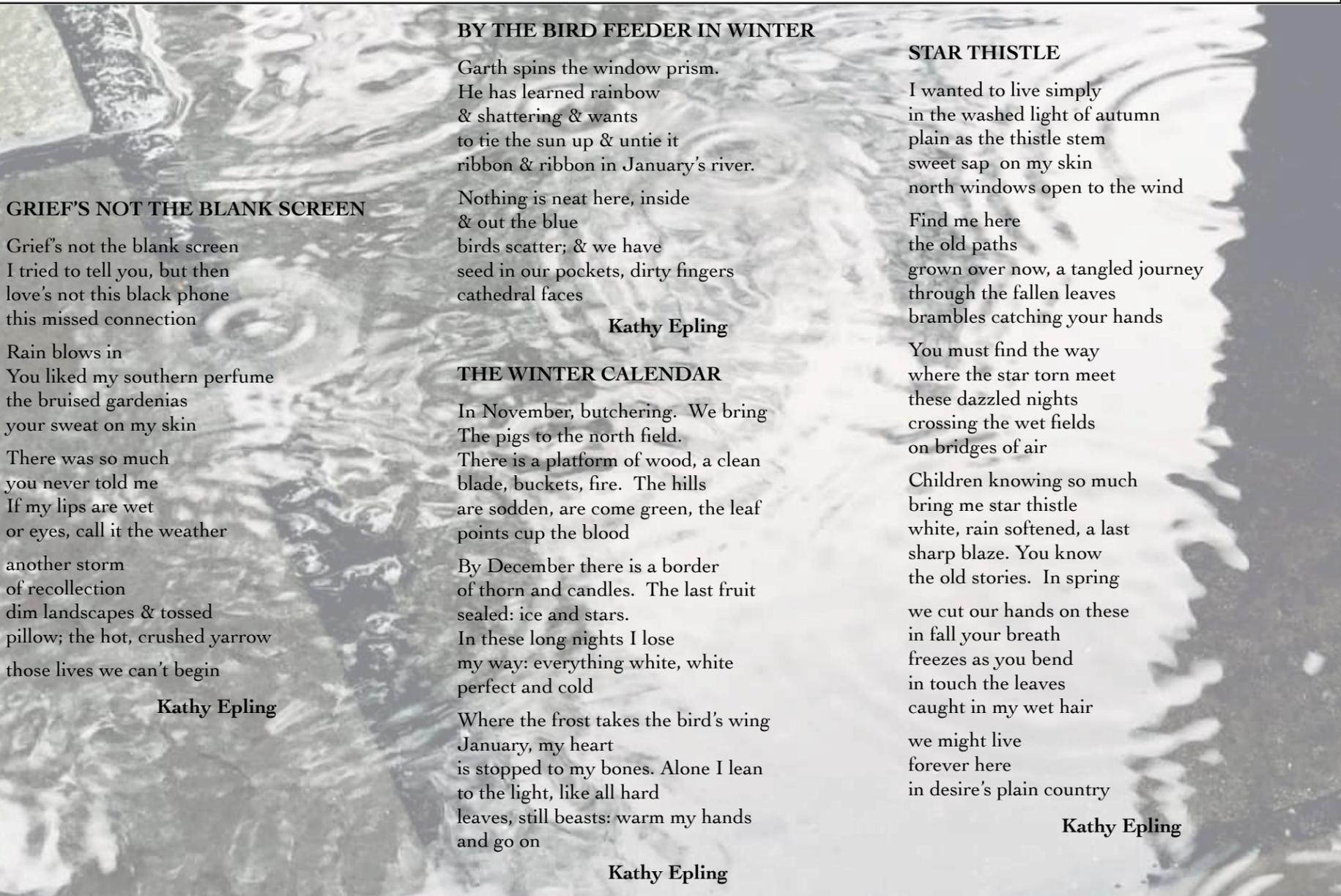
In a month or so the glossy seed catalogs will start piling up again, making us eager to grow rare & beautiful things in every corner we can find; making us sure we can grow anything with ease.

Meanwhile, to give our eyes a few flowers to focus upon in the autumn garden we could put in starts of hardy annuals—a patch of *primulas* or a burst of velvety little *pansies*. I always wish, about now, that I had the foresight to plant autumn *crocuses* & *sternbergia* a few months ago. The silky lilac flowers of the saffron *crocus* would be so welcome now; the bright yellow the *sternbergia* is a sort of foretaste of the *daffodils*. Next year.

Meanwhile for the desperate there are potted chrysanthemums with their bitter sweet scent, the lovely white roots of hyacinths already faithfully filling their jars of water, & the prospect of buds on the old Christmas *cactus*.

*It will be June again before we know it.*

*Kathy Epling*



**GRIEF'S NOT THE BLANK SCREEN**

Grief's not the blank screen  
I tried to tell you, but then  
love's not this black phone  
this missed connection

Rain blows in  
You liked my southern perfume  
the bruised gardenias  
your sweat on my skin

There was so much  
you never told me  
If my lips are wet  
or eyes, call it the weather

another storm  
of recollection  
dim landscapes & tossed  
pillow; the hot, crushed yarrow  
those lives we can't begin

Kathy Epling

**BY THE BIRD FEEDER IN WINTER**

Garth spins the window prism.  
He has learned rainbow  
& shattering & wants  
to tie the sun up & untie it  
ribbon & ribbon in January's river.

Nothing is neat here, inside  
& out the blue  
birds scatter; & we have  
seed in our pockets, dirty fingers  
cathedral faces

Kathy Epling

**THE WINTER CALENDAR**

In November, butchering. We bring  
The pigs to the north field.  
There is a platform of wood, a clean  
blade, buckets, fire. The hills  
are sodden, are come green, the leaf  
points cup the blood

By December there is a border  
of thorn and candles. The last fruit  
sealed: ice and stars.  
In these long nights I lose  
my way: everything white, white  
perfect and cold

Where the frost takes the bird's wing  
January, my heart  
is stopped to my bones. Alone I lean  
to the light, like all hard  
leaves, still beasts: warm my hands  
and go on

Kathy Epling

**STAR THISTLE**

I wanted to live simply  
in the washed light of autumn  
plain as the thistle stem  
sweet sap on my skin  
north windows open to the wind

Find me here  
the old paths  
grown over now, a tangled journey  
through the fallen leaves  
brambles catching your hands

You must find the way  
where the star torn meet  
these dazzled nights  
crossing the wet fields  
on bridges of air

Children knowing so much  
bring me star thistle  
white, rain softened, a last  
sharp blaze. You know  
the old stories. In spring

we cut our hands on these  
in fall your breath  
freezes as you bend  
in touch the leaves  
caught in my wet hair

we might live  
forever here  
in desire's plain country

Kathy Epling

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