



Kathy's Garden: Singing Through The Winter

Having been told that Christmas comes after Thanksgiving, no sooner were the pumpkin pie plates cleared than my youngest son decided to find it. He brought a twig from the woods: "Tree!" and informed us that he would teach the fox terrier some carols. It has been a little hard to convey the concept of "soon, but not now."

Gabriel's eagerness reminds me a lot of the impatience of many a gardener facing the winter. "Why," we sigh, viewing the dormant landscape, "why isn't it June yet?" Being relatively grown up & having gone through a few winters we learn the tricks of survival & hope. Seed catalogs help a little, diverting our minds & bank accounts to promise of gardens to come, in which everything will grow & bloom, even those rare little seeds from the remote Tibetan mountains. But gardeners are earthy sorts as well. We can't be forever dreaming as we wistfully clean our trowels.

The seasoned gardener knows late fall is a grand time to clean up & prune & shape the garden. There is a satisfaction in this, a comfort in heaping leaf mold on dormant beds & turning the compost. Some good & vigorous souls need nothing more. "Yes," they say, striding out to attack the rambler roses & tie back the berry canes, "order & tidiness are their own rewards!"

They probably wear wool next to their skin too, & dream in black & white, & have checkbooks that balance. The rest of us need a little more – some scented, whimsical promise to get us further toward the spring. For the wistful winter gardener the windowsill garden offers promise enough to stave off heartbreak until spring.

It is also—beware—a prime way innocent people get seduced into a lifetime of garden fanaticism. I knew a woman who escaped the garden bug until she was well into her 40s. She would gaze with mild incomprehension as gardeners around her babbled about roses & hyacinths. One day in her supermarket she spied a packet of paperwhite narcissi, marked down.

She bought them, put them in an old flowerpot full of dirt (they would have bloomed in a bowl of water, but she didn't know that), placed them on a windowsill, and watched.

Green shoots came, quickly followed by scented white flowers. Next year she bought more narcissi. And hyacinths. And squills. And tulips. Every window in her house was crowded with pots of bulbs. Her family mildly suggested that maybe some plants could go outside. These days she writes me of her four gardens, and asks if I have hollyhock seed to spare.

Bulbs on the windowsill have the great virtue of keeping their promise & blooming. A packet of crumpled brown anemone corms planted now—soak them overnight in warm water—will give you silky red & blue & white flowers in February or so. If you

can't figure out which end of your anemone is up, plant them sideways. They'll figure it out & bloom for you. Actually they'll bloom even if you plant them upside down. They are beautifully stubborn & determined to bloom no matter where they are. Hyacinths & narcissi & tulips can still be planted indoors & out. You may, like my friend, find bulbs in mark-down bins at markets & nurseries all over. Why not try a handful of promises?

Can fox terriers learn carols? I don't see why not. But I do know bulbs on the windowsill don't need to be taught a thing to sing with beauty through the winter months.

- Kathy Epling



By the willows

You sit by the river
until the deer come
thin, wearing the forest
Your hands move of themselves
Your tongue
enters the leaf
Surely this is a new country
gladness
where the trees open their white ribs
and the deer step into the heart light
naked
needing no language

Laurel, Like The Morning Star

Under the Christmas cold moon
I kindle this fire, praise
plain as bread & milk
as solace once
mothered my hard labor home
& I held to what I could
mud & treebranch, my love's
body, yes the roofree
of this world
enough to keep me
borning & my bright girl
slipped free

~Kathy Epling



"But politics cannot fill the gap. Society, with which Marxism is obsessed, is only a fragment of the totality of life. As I have written, Marxism has no metaphysics: it cannot even detect, much less comprehend, the enormity of the universe and the operations of nature. Those who invest all of their spiritual energies in politics will reap the whirlwind. The evidence is all around us—the paroxysms of inchoate, infantile rage suffered by those who have turned fallible politicians into saviors and devils, godlike avatars of Good versus Evil."

- Camille Paglia



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