

Seeds

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PUBLISHED BY YORK ST JOHN UNIVERSITY

Lord Mayor's Walk, York YO31 7EX United Kingdom

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Printed in Great Britain by Fulprint, York.

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Backtracking

Place the seed in red tobacco,
Blow the surface gently until sparks ignite
Some half-toil plot of dream
We planted; red sky at night, ever our delight.
Place the seed, then lurch through life's trite
All and sundries, whole caboodles,
Lions and tigers and bears (oh my).
Then evening walks down lanes together,
Note the red-brown tertiary sky and
Mottle grunewald topography;
We talked of humans and hearts and life and
Came home to unwashed crockery.

*We'll paint the landing walls magnolia
Paint the downstairs walls magnolia
Wash our face in bone-hard soap and
Rub our fingers in magnolia-*

-bar one sash of earthen red
that hides behind
the raft on the far left side
and just won't take
the paint. Evening, it glows like a
bar on the immersion heating.
After sleeping, we
skirt round each other,
you fold the sheets back,
I draw the curtain.

Outside, there is something
about the seed we planted,
more so the snare of weeds that
sits around it; red sky in the morning,
Ever our warning.

Gyrfalcon

Origin probably

Holarctic. Range extends

Into Greenland

With an isolated race

In Kolguev and

Small relict population

In Wrangel.

Wandering, as opposed to

Migratory.

One British-Irish record:

Immature

Shot near Hastings, England,

Spring 1993.

No further sightings have since

Been confirmed.

Crayfish

For summers
I searched under rocks and stones
For crayfish,
Those black menaces, feigning fear,
Despite their scorpion heritage.
There I was, where the river swung in,
Green to me, from afar, black too.
The slimy stones warranted shoes,
A third limb, maybe, a stick.
But I pressed on with neither.

We loomed long, my net and I. What shadow
Would have delighted a crayfish less, save for
A trawler's silhouette
Prolonged across the riverbed?
One by one, I lifted the rocks
Found mostly moss, and clumps of things
Like dark green umbilical knots that bloom,
Sometimes, put one in mind of
Artichokes.

That the hunted won't be found, was wrong.
It took some months of lift and cast
To prove as much. For there, one day,
Behind a bulwark of claws
He crouched. Agog.
I since recall, once in the light,
Not a black beast, by any account. But red; haematite.

June 21

In the field, in
yellow on green, in
a world of her own, she
can't remember
how she achieved
the orgasm.
She thinks
it must have been
a coincidence,
like doing all the buttons
on the console
at once, then
accidentally killing
the main villain.
The feather grass
sways, the stack mule
tramples ragged-robin,
brays, leans for
a handing of apple.
She pats his nose,
muzzles in,
eyes glazed.

Aye, a Newcomer

The rivulet is Yorkshire black, and still –
 Until the moorhen cleaves it half in two;
 A single mayflower flecks the fringed lane;
While celandines attend in quiet vigil;
 Beyond the rivulet, the land lies smooth;
And mortared clouds attest quotidian rains.

A beck, they'd say, not *rivulet*, not here –
 I walk the leaning bank to curt *bow dos*;
 Soon find myself in want of fells and slate –
How green the Cumbrian waters were, and you;
 Alas, too late.

Ernie Topp

Ernie Topp was well coached by his mother Violet
in his youth, when he was educated in
Homefirth, then Glasgow,
before reading botany
at a London university.
Like his mother, Ernie Topp
Became recognised as a
Botanical artist of some calibre
around the age of thirty five,
and his first work was published
in John Drake's *Wild Flowers*, 1888:
three monochrome plates.
Ornithological critics were pleased,
(as Ernie was)
even though the book
did not enjoy great success; and
even though his mother, then frail and ageing,
sat in a bathtub of green paint, let it
run the length of her dendroid limbs and
bubble and phut behind her
violet eyes.

Eagle Egg

How do you like
Your eagle egg in the morning?
Boiled? Fried? Freeze dried?
Fluffy goat's cheese omelet, pan-wide?
Slung over tartlets and showered in chives?
Nestled in pink tongue of salmon, doe-eyed,
Or straddling corn toast, legs astride?
Or perhaps drafted in as a flapjack bind or
White with the yolk out, with cucumber rind?
It's up to you. You decide.

Garden Show

It's nearly June.
The wild roses are out.
Ticket prices are up, this year,
For the Garden Show, but
We'll still go.
We'll be among beautiful people.
We'll drink tea in a marquis then
I'll treat you to a hyacinth
Or bulbs that portend as much.
Perhaps this year, the sun will
Show up, too, and you'll
Admire the colours, the way you
Used to do, and touch the petals,
Every one; I've noticed, this is
Something new, with you.
See the wild roses by the wall?
They'll be ten a penny, for the
Garden Show. See the garlic flowers,
in the light? Their detail cross-stitch fine.
Except, I notice, your view is in
Sunglass shade, though you spent longer
On your make-up, today. You say;
The Garden Show? Let's only stay
A little while.

Feather Grass

You, feather grass, were the first thing I grew of which
my husband was fond. You bore mid-summer reward.
Fox-vain and preening, you launched
lean panicles of awning even over
tulips; low flowers, now, from the low countries.
Enriched by my combing, you became
ever more the extrovert,
a gold-green burlesque bustle skirt,
no less. Until one day, early autumn, a lifting
of the loam soil at the back, showed
white-dead shell of bulb and corm,
somehow: a graveyard for the spring.
It was your meal ticket, your
life insurance policy. Your toothy grin.

Charlotte

How many times have we walked here, my friend?
At least twelve summers; May to August's end.
From violet nibs of bugle and Christ thorn
To dwarfing Masai spears of tassled corn.

How much has changed, my friend, over the years?
Though, granted, much has stayed the same, and dear.
Last year, we talked about pre-nuptial spats;
Hid your dad's rum in nettles, ten years back.

We'd put the world to rights on laboured soil,
Chew noisily on our Post Office spoils.
Your hair was long, then short, then long once more,
And now, you say, it's short for the long haul.

And when it's time for you to go away,
An urtical, bone-deep sear of pain
to walk these summer fields alone, in lieu.
But oh, to know I've had a friend like you.

Venus' Game

The growth of a Venus flytrap is a continuum of ulterior developments leading to a predictable result. Descriptively, each stage of growth is ephemeral yet important, as together they render possible the concealment of the full plan. Once realised, the outcome is suitably prolonged.

Omen

Before, I'd rub
a skimming stone for luck.

My talisman,
My lake-glazed pixie discus.

But it wasn't what
I touched, the day before I met you.

That was an elm twig,
With rosebud growths; my lady wand.

And for some months
I was grateful to the mother tree

For the happiness
I thought I'd found, and placed

My former omen
Under an oval plate.

Though what I hadn't seen
Was the twig's inner core, and

Snap! How it was fast
A sherbet tube of black pipe-ash.

I retrieved my skimming stone,
Pushed it in the elm tree's nook. She understood.

Chestnut

Tall over mounds and stones,
The chestnut tree. Stately
and custodial, she
casts pastoral shadow over death's hired territory;
Though the land is all her own.

And over time this noble host
gave sanctuary, gladly
both to creeping ivy then
to graves with chimes and teddy
bears; and not once did she groan.

Despite the sap-full, silent tears of rheum
and spiles of morrid twig, come autumn, she
The Chestnut Tree, will breed
again, the maron-balls of chestnut seed.
And dare not say she's through.

Oak

The oak stoops, ox-like, over gardens green,
And we are all but six years old, enthralled.
Knots of acorns burgeon at our feet,
While pinecones tumble-roll across the lawns.
The air partitions mists and dufts of smoke,
The latter coursing gently from the pyres,
We launch ourselves from skids of planken oak,
Pierce scrimms of autumn rain, a laughing choir.
A joy to be, a skill to love ourselves,
Honed then in warm Julys and Augusts hot.
We'd only ever find ourselves repelled
By days too wet to live our merry plot.
I'm all but thirty six, in perfect health.
The oak is gone; I do not love myself.

Gourd

In a fizz of mist, I prised
A bottle gourd from the earth.
Slid in the tapermouth spade,
Sluiced him out, a shiny crop; clean.
I thought I heard a pop.

In a fizz of mist, I held
The bottle gourd out to you.
You wiped your hands on your tapered jeans,
Took him tenderly, admired
Our bottle-green bell pear,
Our perfect soil swelling, striped like
A cartoon watermelon.

You asked, shall we carve a face
In it? Drape it in cobwebs
For Halloween? Have a candle flicker
In it? I watched you make leaps
In the soil, laugh like a puppy.
I wondered – if indeed we carved a face –
Would it be smiling?

Christmas Trees from Damascus

We demote a chair for the tree
That time of year; any old chair.
The one on stoic fours with noble intent, or
The one like jetsam, flipped by a wave,
Bent. The shabby one. “Old white.”
It doesn’t matter. Each of us minds our task,
Assigns a part; one draws the knife and cuts
His teeth as a gardener’s chief hand, or
Midwife to the trees; shipped in from Damascus,
That year, packed tight to themselves
Like otters out of water.
Not a stray hair through the sheath.

Until quite soon they burst to fill a room, now, dear, lights!
Put the angel on the top, above the lion that peeps,
The lion – devil blue – that peeps, and winks.
Your daughter doesn’t like that one (did you forget)
So put the lion at the back.
Sweetheart, forget about him. The lion that peeps.
Now he can face the wall, I say, and we can watch
The TV without sound, in peace. For every whirl,
Another declaration. Another clarification
In the papers that provide the clay things with their
Soft incarceration.

My husband stands on chairs for the tree
That time of year; for the sake of perfection.
He is old, these days. We watch
Most things with the sound down.
Even the click of the secateurs alarms him.
We whisper, too, like gas and air,
Suck ourselves in, will ourselves to be unbirthed,
All fours suspended in bluey gum
Away from the lion – devil blue – that peeps, and winks
Until the angels shudder, and the forests shrink.

Fat Cake: Notes to Self



- Hang on tree (can put squirrel-proof bird feeder)



• Seeds, old butterflies,
worms etc etc.



- Dead mouse/sk, even squirrel

• Expect owls, if present
mice/squirrels.



Fat cake with seeds

You will need:

Dry mixture

Lard

A yoghurt pot

A length of twine

Aim for one part fat to two parts dry mixture.

Note: the dry mixture can contain

Any combination of the following:

Oats, bread crumbs, cake crumbs,

Raisins, currants, white millet, red millet,

Wheat, rape and linseed. The lard you use

Can be rendered or unrendered, from

Any old pig, and whether the yogurt

From the pot was made from goat's milk

Or cow's milk is, likewise,

Of no consequence.

First, combine all your dry ingredients. Melt some

Lard in a pan and add the dry mix, then stir well

Until the mixture binds together. Make a hole

In the bottom of a yoghurt pot and insert

A piece of twine, then fill the pot

with the mixture. Leave in the fridge

To set, then once set, slowly ease it from the pot.

Tie a large knot in the twine to support the cake, then

Hang the cake on a branch. For extra blackbirds,
Add sunflower hearts. To attract robins,
Insert mealworms. If squirrels are a problem,
You can buy a squirrel-proof feeder. For owls,
Insert mice or squirrels.

This is the winter

This is the winter.

Grass cropped close, precise as a buzz cut;

Bristles at the mudflat lip.

The air snipes. Gnomes by the pond

Whose eyes roll back to the click of the crow

Convey neither awe nor disappointment.

The plastic heron waits;

And crotchet knots of birds cannot perceive

How, though the earth yields ictus,

The wooden chimes are stolen from the eaves,

And old words huddle, quiver

Underneath the paper membrane of an empty nest of bees.

And when the limen breaks (though rare that is)

A tumble-birth of droppings from the snag

Left far too long; cut-loose, and hardened,

Black. Then sometimes, something waits

Beneath the low-pat groin of earth

A sudden shift. Within the noduled branch

Is green.

Dawn

Under blanche-snip moon
an owl returns,
its form tautly reflected
in an unbreached
brumal bowl of Loch.
Each thump of wing
Is a heart pump's boom;
 He soars.

The Author

Rosie is a language teacher and writer based in north Yorkshire. She writes for the *Guardian's* Mind Your Language blog, and has worked as a travel writer across Europe, focusing on sustainable travel and green living. A passionate campaigner for environmental protection, her creative writing extols nature's beauty and simplicity whilst alerting readers to the transience of such states.