

This Time of Year

By Anna Von Reitz



Sunday afternoon, April sunshine; for now the light so pale and clear, catches the reflection of mud puddles and rivulets, and the pale and equally transparent sky. Birds have begun to reappear like the budded branches of the trees.

Those newly arrived avians sit hunched up against the petty chill, like northbound Floridians taking an early trip home to see the Grandkids, mostly quiet, while those who saw the worst of the winter here twirl and chirp and wheel like acrobats in the air, dizzy with the sudden warmth and light.

Pussy willows, clad in grey-white fur, poke their toes out into the world, tempted by the sunshine.

Everywhere you look, there's mud. Mud where mud should be, and where it shouldn't, on dog paws, and in window boxes, in the shadow of trees, on my front doorstep.

For a moment anyway, I give up the constant battle.

Just take a deep breath of the cool air and breathe.

If we are just patient for a moment, we will know what all went on, which tulip bulbs were eaten by shrews, where Tom Young, the Weasel, Esquire, spent the winter, how many bunnies have been hiding in the old wood pile, which perennials are stirring to life, and which succumbed to the snowiest winter on record.

Thank God for the old brown and reddish brown Wellies, rubber boots the way rubber boots should be, made for long, slow steps on soft ground. They are just

right to find one's way out into the woods, to look for the earliest early blooms and mushrooms, and find me a seat on a sturdy windfall, looking down at the greening moss and tiny, stubborn Twin Flowers between my feet.

A single, fat, and enterprising Robin is staring at me, giving me a round eye without a wink; he's laying odds on whether or not there will be more snow this spring. Not a blizzard, more like a "snow shower", I reply, on my internal telepathy channel.

The robin won't bet against me and gives a flutter.

Most of the country is still brown and tattered as the last days of November, dry grasses bent over, some plastered flat even after the ice is gone.

Alone, with no guarantees, some brave seeds and roots are beginning to sprout.

My eyes hungrily search for and find the faintest bits of green. I find some pointed shards of life in the heart of a chives plant that self-seeded in the margin of my driveway, and a chunk of black woody chaga mushroom on a birch tree.

It's a bit early for foraging, but a month from now (I mark the spot) when the surface water has sunk away into the earth, there will be mushrooms galore, and every kind of herb.

By then, there will be miniature dogwoods by the millions carpeting the forest floor with white, four-petaled flowers, each bearing their own stigmata.

The birch sap is running now, like the clear rivulets of snow melt trickling and laughing in the buoyant air, seeming to say, what Fools these mortals be, that look and do not see....the miracles unfolding.

Thirty years ago, I planted chives and rhubarb, Jacob's Ladder, rugosa roses, and by some miracle, they are all still here with me.

It's all so glorious, it's almost painful.

My neighbor has hauled out his cast iron barbecue grill. The wood briquettes are like incense in the air, whiffs of faint blue smoke drifting through the bare-limbed trees.

There was a time, this time of year, when we licked the sweet sap from our fingers and thought of God; a time when we remembered those we'd lost the prior year, and healed our wounds by firelight.

It wasn't so long ago.

I stood alone in the rocky field behind my house, surrounded by the dry skeletons of yarrow left over from last summer, just as the stars came out. A crisp wind came with the sunset and I huddled down deeper in my warm jacket, peering out into the half-light like an old tortoise.

How did I come to be here, I wondered, across all the eons of time and space, to this one solitary moment, this one place, all by myself?

I was just turning toward home when another neighbor loomed up in the dusk, a monstrous shadow like a bear in Carhart's overalls.

"Brought you some eggs," he said, "just laid [this morning](#)."

He is a newcomer to the country, a mechanic from town, returning to the Old Ways, nurturing his first flock of hens. I smiled.

We strolled companionably enough back to the house, talking about the things neighbors talk about, the weather, the price of gasoline, his wife's new sewing machine, his gout.

Of course, respecting the Code of the West, I hadn't asked him what drove him to come find me.

I rustled around and found a jar full of tart cherry juice leftover from my husband's most recent flare up, then rustled around some more for my supplies of Gout Tea, packed it up in a brown paper sack and gave it to him, as a gift in return.

Centuries seemed to roll away.

This is the way it always was, and the way it still should be, a simple matter of neighbors helping neighbors, sharing the sunshine, the stars, and the grief. Sometimes a box of fresh eggs.

Still thoughtful and caught in the web of timelessness, I watched as he limped down the driveway and across the road, disappearing into the trees. It was nearly dark.

The winter, with its silence and its blanket of snow, is gone. Another season has come.

The footpaths of the neighborhood will be bare once more, and well-worn, full of jostling kids with bicycles and backpacks, middle-aged men suffering from gout, probably a donkey or two, and a Saint Bernard, if past experience is any guide.

All the while, hour by hour, the relentless spring returns this time of year; I shall welcome it as long as I am able, and become part of it, when I am not. The Big Dipper will find its way to the edge of the sky, and a cold wind will blow just after sunset, scattering the yarrow seeds upon the wet ground.

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