

Wild Garden

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

Fragrant Cloud. *The blooms are coral-orange, high centered, and one of the most fragrant flowers ever. It's green foliage is an excellent foil for the large blooms. This rose will blossom best in areas with long cool summers.*

Even though it was late November, it still bloomed. Extravagantly. Obviously it had no shame, obviously it reveled in its own beauty. Why was it still blooming in November? He said he would ask his mother, because his mother grows roses. Now it's early in the new year and the roses are not blooming anymore, but some still linger on in the cold nights, and some might call this miraculous. I know I do. Even in the bright morning air, they hang there, frozen, a still-life, but somehow still defiant. Then, a month later, this boy called me up and told me, "I'm not falling in love with you." And I thought, how odd, because I have fallen in love with you. I didn't say this, but I thought it. I thought: How is possible that a rose can still bloom in November?

Meanwhile, the gardeners in my neighborhood have covered up most of their rose bushes with plastic bags. One tall vine looks like a man, a scarecrow, wrapped up tight in plastic, with a bucket for a head. So surely his mother has covered up her roses, like he has covered his heart. Because I am just vain enough to feel that he has fallen in love with me, but that this has scared him. And now he has run away. And I'll be honest and say that he wasn't a boy, he was a man. And I'll be honest, and say I wanted to keep him, and plant him in my garden. I wanted him to blossom every night, even in winter, inside my mouth. I wanted him to cry from the sheer joy of being so firmly twined between my legs. I wanted to show him that the roses that bloom are red, and white, and when they blossom beneath the sun, they fill the air, they rise above the garden. They possess such grace. Who would not want to witness this?

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So, it's a good thing he could not see me pacing the small confines of my apartment, all the wildness washing out of me. It's hard not to feel the futility of love when this happens. It's hard, but I resisted. Even as I remembered the way he would grab me and push me down on the bed, enter me without a sound, like a queen receiving her consort; the way it's done in mythology, the passionate coupling, where words are not necessary. That's the way he made love to me. He didn't kiss my neck or my ears, he didn't tickle my feet, he barely had time to caress my breasts.

Peace. *Blended yellow and ochre, 40-45 petals, a sensuous explosion of fecundity, perfectly symmetrical as if one bloom begot another bloom and so on and so forth. Revered for its perfection.*

It was a warm November, that's what the almanac said, but still people marveled that the roses were still blooming. I love you, anyway, wild garden. I do. I always marvel at your beauty. I love you in the summer because you appear to be sleeping while cicadas hum in the tall grass. I love you in the fall when the russet leaves drift down into your mouth, and I love you in the winter, when only one white rose, frozen, stubbornly refuses to fall to the ground and say, "Enough. I give up." I am not a fickle lover. I am steadfast and I have taken you into my heart without a moment's hesitation. I know you will change as the seasons change, and I know you will shape-shift into different versions of yourself, but I have never let this scare me.

* * *

New Year aka Arcadian. *Bright, yet graceful, orange yellow flowers that are almost resistant to change. Arcadian manages to be both boisterous and refined at the same time.*

And now this. This heartbreak. Now the image of him entering me in the morning, while the sun was coming up, is only a memory. And because it is early in the new year, and because the world outside is frozen, I keep warm by focusing on his silhouette

emerging from my shower, handing him a cup of coffee. And the way I would gloat as he dressed, "This tall man made love to me three times last night."

I have to be very careful that I do not let this memory shatter to pieces on my kitchen floor. I have to hold it delicately, reverently. Like the way he would take the tip of himself and gradually push his way between my legs, and the way I would shiver, almost convulse, when he began to make love to me. And at that exact moment, when he was finally and completely inside of me, I saw stars. This is true and anyone who has lived through this will agree because it's like the magical four words, once upon a time.

Dainty Bess. *Instead of double, high-centered blooms, she makes do with five petals, each a delicate light pink, almost silver. She is considered an easy-care rose, and an excellent choice as a specimen near paths, or in the perennial border.*

Once upon a time, he pulled me down into the damp grass of a deserted park, the ground cold, the street lights arcing out into the night, a halo of broken leaves inside my hair. His tongue like the serpent, his fingers exploring my cold skin, now warming to his touch. My body left an imprint of this; phosphorescent, almost radioactive. Walk by there any time of day or night, and you will still be able to see it. It glows in the dark. But don't touch it, or it will break. Best to leave it alone, and let it fade of its own accord, when it desires, when the moment is right.

Mutabilis. *High variation in bloom color due to the rapid change as the blossoms mature. Blooms change rapidly from copper orange through the warm spectrum to finish crimson.*

Believe it or not, it is January 3, the temperature is minus seventeen and one white rose will not be forgotten, will not fall. Sometimes it hurts to walk by and see this. Sometimes the impulse to pluck it and bring it home is so great, my hand trembles. I want

to pluck it and put it in my freezer until spring. Wrap it in plastic and keep it all winter long, bring it back to the garden in March. I don't think this is crazy. There is a species of roses, tiny roses, that hibernate all winter long, they look like they are sleeping. But they are waiting for the first headlong rush into the warmth of spring.

This shows an intelligence I had not thought possible in roses. But it exists and that is part of the miracle. That white rose is not dead, but sleeping, and that is why it has not fallen to the ground even though it is January 3, and the temperature is minus seventeen. There is plenty of evidence to support this theory. Think of Attis. They say that in the old days, during the spring festival, he was hung or otherwise slain beneath a pine tree. And the pine tree was always in a grove or a garden. His blood fertilized the earth, and everything bloomed like it was supposed to year after year, century after century.

Angel Face. *Deep mauve, ruffled flowers; a tremendous rose because the flowers are produced profusely...the only drawback is that it's so low-growing that the scent may not reach your nose unless you bend over to enjoy it*

Why should my heart break every time I pass this garden? Why should I have fallen in love with someone who doesn't love me? I should take matters into my own hands. He said his mother grows roses, right? All the more reason to do something. Something is better than nothing. Better than pacing this small apartment, piercing my skin on the wrought iron gates of the garden, that in truth, I have never entered. And yes, I know it's not really my garden. And of course, I don't grow these roses. They are not mine. I don't tend to them, water them, mulch them and cover them up in October to keep them safe. I have not given birth to this garden, but that doesn't mean I love it any less. That doesn't mean that I don't have a right to happiness, to fertility. Let me fall in love again. Let me grow a garden of wild roses. Better yet, let this white rose bloom again in the spring, like Attis.

Footnote: *Because it so elusive, the pursuit of a blue rose has been the goal of many a breeder. The closest anyone has come has been lavender roses, normally moving the magenta tones towards the blue end of the scale. The problem is that most of these hybrids have been plagued with weak growth, and shy blooming.*

I love you, anyway.

