

Each day she wakes, and wonders how far through she'll get. It is a quiet kind of a thought; she's had her share of drama twice over, and she takes comfort, these days, in the slow emptiness of time. She is a woman who cares about her appearance, even when there's no-one there to see. After her shower, before her breakfast, she sits at her dressing table and puts on her face: make-up, architecture, alchemy, love.

She maps cheeks, nose, forehead, chin, with dabs of foundation, circles her fingers against her skin until her face is a pale, smooth pink. A whisper of blusher; her eyelids sparkling white; eyelashes curled into thick black strands. These days, her lips are difficult: she spends time with liner, powder, lipstick, gloss. She holds her gaze in the mirror and sprays perfume below each ear. It's the same perfume she's worn since she married; it reminds her of spring.

When she's done, she takes slow, fragile steps downstairs. She makes sweet black coffee, and takes it out to the garden. There is a weariness in her this morning, slow and grey. She sits on the chair made from wrought black iron, and closes her eyes. Her coffee turns cold. The garden holds her.

I am winter garden
build a space
for the wind
mark my perimeter
with words
frozen language
like scattered ice
find my roots:
winter water wet



to write the sound of a branch
c r a c k
beneath winter boots

to write the space at the top of
a heartbeat when everything
is silent possible now

to write dreams duck
egg blue snow white

to write the last leaf on
the last tree hanging



hibernus hibernal
hibernate
stop putting things
off until the spring
listen to the music
the wind makes
watch the ghost
brambles grow

When Sophie left, I spent half a week lying in bed staring at the wardrobe. You're acting like she's dead, my husband said. She'll be back in a couple of months, with her dirty washing most likely, the same way Stevie was. I couldn't explain, so I retreated to the thin strip of garden at the back of our house, and watched the grass fade, and the leaves turn crisp brown. I can't bear it, I told him over dinner, all that dying going on outside. He leaned back in his chair, and told me about Dogwood and Chinese witch hazel, Spindle trees and Christmas roses.



I spent the autumn planning for winter. There are plants that relish the cold, dark days. I sought out red-stemmed Dogwood; Nicotiana; Wintersweet; Choisya sundance; Nandina domestica. I cut a curved bed through the centre of the lawn – where the kids used to play ball after dinner. I knelt and dug and planted, until my back ached and my fingernails sported thin black moon-slices of soil. I took comfort in the idea of a garden made for winter.



The night before Sophie came home that first Christmas, I couldn't sleep. I ate a cheese sandwich, standing at the kitchen window, then made nettle tea and scraped open the bolts on the back door. Outside, the air was snow-cold. I held my tea to my chest, and danced a gentle waltz across the grass. Then I lay, by the edge of the flower bed, and breathed in my garden's quiet winter scent.