

Nature: Dawn flowers

Salena Godden

gonna get my hands dirty
gonna put mud in pots
gonna water them bulbs
gonna watch them yellow stars
burst through the grey days

I'm an amateur gardener. I laugh about it and call my style of gardening: punk gardening. Our garden is more a small back yard with pots and two tall holly trees. Jasmine and ivy cover the back wall. In summer, I try to grow herbs and tomatoes out in the backyard. I feed the sparrows and tits and robins, and encourage flowers to grow free and wild. I don't plant things at the right time of year or in the right places. Any pot will do, I throw some mud in and some seeds or bulbs and wait to see what happens, sometimes nothing and sometimes something. No high expectations, just a little hope and some water. I don't do gardening regularly or correctly. I don't read gardening books and follow the recipe. I plant bulbs as I say in odd places and forget where or what I planted. I do this because I enjoy that moment of discovery – beauty and colour popping up out of nowhere against the odds.

Every year my neighbour next door has the most beautiful plump cerise-coloured roses, the blooms are as fat as your face and the stems grow tall. Each year I enjoy them from my side of the fence. They smell like 1970s roses, the kind of plush rose petals I used to make perfume out of when I was a girl. Last summer, someone trimmed her rose bush and branches fell on my side of the fence. I shoved a branch in the cold mud, and it has taken

root and started to grow. This summer there will be fat pink roses on both sides of the fence. Do you think she will notice?

I have seen evidence that my anarchic approach to planting miraculously works. I watch flowers bloom in dark corners with very little tender loving care: the daffodil, gladioli, foxglove, iris, cornflower and poppy pop up, one by one along the borders, in pots and through the cracks between the concrete and the fence. Against all odds, flowers take root, find life, water and light.

Nature is this, an ability to adapt and change.

I used to have terrible Soho-itis: I'd be out all night almost every night in Soho, getting myself into secret dive bars and excellent mischief. I still do that occasionally, but I have changed and times have changed – so many of those wicked bars have disappeared and Soho does not feel like my playground anymore. I seem to have switched teams from being an up-all-nighter writer to being a morning writer. This morning writing is a habit that began when I was writing my first book, the memoir, *Springfield Road*. It grew against the odds in a dark corner. I have adapted to become a writer that wakes up to start work at 4 a.m. I am like a sunflower, I turn my face towards the rising sun.

All year I work watching the seasons change; I see the light change, the moon set and the sun rise. In the winter, in the dark, in the silent frosty dawn, this is where I like to write. And in the summer when it is warm, I open the window and my room is filled with golden sunshine and the dawn chorus of birdsong. I like to write then, first thing, with my dreams still vivid, before the myriad of tasks and chores come knocking and stress and panic me. When everyone is fast asleep, I sit here at my desk and listen to daybreak, and the first blackbird. The thinking I do at dawn is as clear as that, where the memory of a dreamscape meets the lapis blue of first light.

I am here for this, I plant dawn flowers.

Not everything I write will succeed and bloom, but that's not my motivation. I am finding calm and peace and joy in ordinary morning miracles – a fox sleeping under the ivy, or a robin hopping among budding snowdrops in my window box. Each morning the earth turns, the sun rises and the flowers grow. It is remarkable, this morning, this world, we must all wake up and fight harder for this, for clean air and clean water, for peace and love, for this green and blue planet, our home.

Salena Godden

Born in the UK, Salena Godden is of Jamaican-Irish heritage and based in London. The poet, author, activist, broadcaster, memoirist and essayist has published several books, written for BBC TV and radio and has released four studio albums.

Published books include poetry volumes *Under The Pier* (Nasty Little Press); *Fishing in the Aftermath: Poems 1994-2014* (Burning Eye); and literary memoir *Springfield Road* (Unbound).

Pessimism Is For Lightweights – 13 pieces of Courage and Resistance, was published by Rough Trade Books in July 2018. The poem 'Pessimism is for Lightweights' was a public poetry art piece on display outside the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol for over eighteen months. The poem has been donated to People's History Museum in Manchester, where it is now on permanent display.

Now in her fourth decade producing work, Salena Godden is a poet whose riotous poems tend to precede her, including the comic and political poetry anthems: 'My Tits Are More Feminist Than your Tits', 'Imagine If You Had To Lick It' and 'Can't Be Bovvered'. *LIVEwire*, released by indie spoken word label Nymphs and Thugs, was shortlisted for the Ted Hughes Award.

Essays include 'Shade', published in the award-winning anthology

edited by Nikesh Shukla, *The Good Immigrant* (Unbound); 'Skin' broadcast on *The Essay*, BBC Radio 3; 'We are The Champions' published in *Others* (Unbound); and 'Broken Biscuits' in *Smashing it! Working class artists on life, art and making it happen* (edited by Sabrina Mahfouz, Saqi, 2009).

Her debut novel, *Mrs Death Misses Death*, is published by Canongate.

A recording of this talk can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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