



Photo by Autumn Moti Pothhegaver

The Colours of Grief

*Wandering through the seasons
in a year of loss.*

Words by Alice Elgie

The dark humus of mud and mulch squelches beneath my feet as I walk along the towpath on a mid-winter's day. Looking down—tears pricking my eyes—it feels like the colour of grief.

Back in mid-summer grief felt blue, like the soft powdery skies. Sad but gentle, and light enough to keep breathing beneath its weight. But then, with another death—more unexpected this time—summer gave way to an autumn of deeper, more brutal hues. I found myself clinging with desperation to wisps of shimmering gold amidst dank brown, just to keep my head above ground.

Winter descended with timely hunger. I wanted (needed) to retreat from the world. Dark was only occasionally pierced by the glinting of fruit leathers—keepers of sun-ripened bounty—and the wild dancing of burnt orange in my woodburner, superimposed onto a background of a blood red sunrise over water.

I kept my focus.

And then, that day; that humus day, I finally raised my tear-filled eyes and was shocked to be lifted by the sight of a murky canal reflected with a vague stonewash blue and the brightest yellow—a singular leaf—stopping me in my tracks. The swell of my heart was instantaneous and, as if in unison, the sun poked through the heavy duvet-piled grey sky to light up the reeds. Moorhens bathed in the shallows and suddenly everything was seen beneath a lemon veil.

When submersed in the ocean that is grief, these moments of brightness in nature have saved me from drowning. They are the glints of hope guiding me forward.

Now, it is the green of new birth that sees me awaken from my winter slumber. Tree branches swathed in paper-thin lichen curl upwards, bright gold beneath the early spring sun, buds pushing out from each gnarled join. My Southernwood begins to bush and swirl and as life unfurls so do I, stretching my newness beneath bright white blackthorn blossom.

On the bow of my boat I push seeds into dirt and wait patiently for first shoots. Soon, I know, a riot of colour will erupt to lift my soul. And, just as flowers attract insects, so glimmers of life will return to my body, in time to mark the first year without two people I most preciously loved.

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Fruit Leather Recipe

*From my friend, Therese Muskus,
Laikenbuie, Highlands of Scotland.*

- Wash, drain and simmer berries (e.g. raspberries, strawberries, blackberries) in a saucepan with no extra water until soft enough to pass through a sieve. This will remove seeds for a smooth leather.
- Add 1.5 cups of puréed fruit to a blender with two mashed bananas and test for sweetness. You can add 1 tbsp of maple syrup or similar if too sharp. Aim for a thick, not runny purée.
- Spread the mixture onto a lightly oiled solid sheet and put in a dehydrator to dry for about 12 hours or until they are slightly tacky in the middle and you can peel the fruit from the oiled sheet from the edge.
- While warm cut into strips around 4 x 15 cm and roll tightly. They should stick to themselves at the end.
- Place in a clean jar and try not to eat too many at a time as it is very concentrated fruit! 🌿



Photo by Valeria Terekhina