

BOOK STUFF

#32

We are like books. Most people only see our cover, the minority read only the introduction, many people believe the critics. Few will know our content. Emile Zola

Time By Sarah Simms

Time is an Ally. Bomb-sharing expectation heavyweight, she laughs knowing change will come inevitably rolling forth over the bunkers where we wait. Our only mission: To leap, to chance, guns blazing – to do her proud at last.



"Before we blow the whole thing up, have you thought about proposing a referendum?"

Fascinating facts or a damp squib? Bonfire Night is over but it's never too late (is it?) for a quiz:

1. When and where were fireworks invented?
2. When was the first documented use of fireworks in England?
3. What happened on Nov 5, 1605?
4. Which Shakespeare play, written in 1605 or 1606 is about the murder of a Scottish king?
5. When and where was the largest firework display ever recorded?



Opposites

*Which famous book titles are the opposite of these made up titles?
For example, Craze and Craziness = Sense and Sensibility.*

6. The Love I Take
7. Hate in the Time of Perfect Health
8. Midday's Adults
9. The Science of Peace
10. Big Men

Missing Names

Can you guess the names which are missing from these book titles?

11. S _ _ _ _ e's World
12. E _ _ _ _ _ r Oliphant is Completely Fine
13. E _ _ a
14. The Picture of D _ _ _ _ n Gray
15. J _ _ _ _ _ n Strange and Mr Norrell



When I moved into my first apartment, my parents gave me a houseplant to liven up the otherwise empty cube. The plant was a delicate little thing in a purple foam pot, with skinny stems stretching out from a ball of roots. It didn't have real leaves, just short, flat needles, like a young hemlock waiting in the understory. It was maybe a foot tall and a foot wide, and in the year I lived there, I don't think it grew an inch.

I'd never taken care of a plant before, but the doctor thought it might be good for me, might give me some tether to the real world, some reason to leave my head every day. In practice though, my tenure as guardian was marked with the same neglect and disinterest that clouded the rest of my world. The thin, fragile needles slowly transitioned from deep green to pale yellow, eventually falling off to join the dust on my living room carpet. Lacking quality sunlight and sufficient water, it began heavy rationing, giving up entire stems to allow the roots to persist, waiting for the spring rains to relieve the winter's drought. Deep in its genetic memory, its ancestors taught my little plant how to bide its time, waiting until I emerged from my cave and took notice.

And, every now and then, I would wake up to my role as caregiver and go on a spree of good behaviour. I moved it into the sunlight, I watered it regularly, and I rejoiced as its remaining needles regained their rich hue. For a little while, I felt the sturdy cable of reality holding me to the ground, fighting off the strong upward currents. Every now and then, just for a week or two, we had it good. Until, soon enough, I would be back in the clouds again, holding a rope no longer tied to anything, with my plant back on earth, steeling itself once more for a long walk through the desert.

I don't know if the phenology of a plant can get used to seasons like this, if it ever learned to expect the freeze-thaw of my love and attention, the monsoon cycle of my mental state, or felt the full disappointment every time. When the days between waterings began to stretch, when the soil began to crack and crumble, when it had to begin deciding which stems and needles it could keep, did it know what was coming? I suspect it was more resilient than I was; I know I never got used to it. Every time, I thought, this time I'll stick with it. This time I'll do it right. This time I will plant myself firmly in the ground and hold the crazy at bay. But I never could.

I moved back into treatment after about a year, and the plant returned to my parents' house. It got a new ceramic pot and a fresh bag of potting soil. It got a prime location centre stage in their dining-room window, with a few friendly neighbours to talk about whatever it is that plants talk about. Shared trauma, perhaps.

Three years later, the plant is looking better than I ever knew was possible. Two feet tall, three or four feet wide. Probably fifty stems stretching out of its densely packed base, all of them loaded up with forest-green needles. The roots are thick and bursting out of the soil, holding bulbous brown nodules that I'd never seen before, perhaps to store all the extra nutrients it produces now. Perhaps, in those thick roots, it still carries the memory of those lean times, recalling the lessons it learned to survive those cycles of neglect.

And I wonder if it remembers me. When I'm home now, I spend a lot of time looking at it, holding its springy branches between my fingers, feeling the strength it has built up. It's hard to imagine we were once so close to the brink, that I was once so helpless, so incapable of caring for another living thing. When no one else is around, when the low setting sun catches in its long curving stems, I can sit there for an hour or more, just staring.

But eventually, I get up, and I give it a little water. Even when I know it's being taken care of, even when I know it doesn't need me, it still feels good. To apologize, I suppose. I'm moving back into my own apartment soon, and I'm thinking of asking it to come with me.

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With thanks to our volunteer, Katy

Answers:

1. China
2. 1486 at King Henry VII and Elizabeth of York's wedding
3. A small gang of Catholics and minor noblemen plotted to blow up the Houses of Parliament
4. Macbeth
5. In the Philippines in 2016
6. The Hate U Give
7. Love in the Time of Cholera
8. Midnight's Children
9. The Art of War
10. Little Women
11. Sophie's World
12. Eleanor Oliphant is Completely Fine
13. Emma
14. The Picture of Dorian Gray
15. Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell

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