

## **In My Garden, May.**

Too solemn for day, too sweet for night,  
Come not in darkness, come not in light;  
But come in some twilight interim,  
When the gloom is soft and the light is dim.

WILLIAM SIDNEY WALKER.

5 o'clock on a May morning out in the sticks can be as noisy as Oxford Street on a Saturday at this time of year; amazing and wonderful the famous dawn chorus, as loud as any racket you could imagine. Even a ubiquitous blackbird; common-place and taken for granted, sings as beautifully as any bird throughout the world. The owls actually start this symphony off often with a final discordance of noisy hooting just before the first flicker of light at dawn; tuning up the orchestra, but there also is a second evening performance to this matinee. The dusk chorus is just the same but in reverse. Before they roost birds will perch and sing their hearts out with just the same vigorous gusto. Pour a drink, sit out and listen, just as the sun descends below the horizon, enjoy this perfect happy hour one of the most special parts of the day. As the singing gradually draws to a close there is the definitive owlish applauding finale as in total darkness the symphony approaches conclusion.

Soft pink and a rather poor shape by modern standards, a rose called 'Hume's Blush Tea-Scented China' grows tolerably well in my garden when given some protection from late spring frosts or too much rain. It has some interesting history attached to it; introduced from China in 1808 at a time when plants imported from around the world travelled in the open air on decks of sailing ships. Running the gauntlet of different climatic zones, under-watering often with brackish water, covered with canvas often for weeks on end during stormy weather; it was said that only one in a thousand plants ever survived these traumas. Eventually however it found its way to the Château de la Malmaison, where Napoleon's wife Josephine had created one of the most important gardens in Europe. Midst the tumult of the Napoleonic wars, at the Anglo-French pinnacle of mutual hatred and despise, nothing stopped for gardening. Plants were freely passed around Europe despite the naval blockades, stories of parcels full of seeds addressed to Josephine being found on captured French ships kindly forwarded on to her. With wars raging at their peak remarkable transactions were made between French and British admiralities for the protection and safe passage of this rose.

Known then as *Rosa indica* 'Fragrans', in the height of war it safely travelled from London to Paris personally escorted with nurseryman John Kennedy right through the blockade and all the way to Malmaison. Could anyone imagine Kew or the R.H.S. swapping plants and hints and handy tips with Eva Braun during the battle of Britain?

A daffodil is in flower now, called *Narcissus poeticus* 'Plenus', this is a double form of the well known flat faced orange trumpeted Pheasant's Eye. It has a dozen petals or so, slightly creamish toward the centre, and very, very scented; a couple of flowers in a vase easily perfume the entire room. Looking more like a *Gardenia* than a daffodil, it is also extremely late flowering, I grow it in the centre of my garden where the earth is rich and deep and moisture retentive, it loves these conditions; it's also the coldest part of the garden which makes it bloom later still. Often the leaves have barely poked through the soil at Easter when most other narcissus are fully out, sometimes there are still stragglers flowering at the start of June.

© AndrewtheGardener, 3/5/17.