

# Wintering: The Power of Rest + Retreat in Difficult Times

Kathenne May (2020) (1)

"Somewhere in the middle of this catastrophe, a space opened up."

↓  
↳ GAPS in the mesh of the everyday world  
Sometimes they open up and you fall through them into **SOMEWHERE ELSE**  
Between two worlds.

Wintering is a season of cold. It's a fallow period in life when you're cut off from the work-side-lined, blocked from progress, or cast into the role of outsider.

However it arrives, wintering is usually involuntary, lonely & deeply painful. Yet it's also inevitable  
... agree?

Runs at a different pace to the here + now

We dream of equatorial habitat, forever close to the sun, an endless, unvarying high season. ~~But~~ life's not like that. ✓ cycles (2)

♥ In all that whiteness, I saw the chance to make myself new again.

"consistent"  
"regular"  
"sustainable"  
(language)

## Heretical - AND Natural

I am aware that I flin in the face of polite convention in doing this... falling out of sync with everyday life remain taboo. We're not raised to recognize wintering. Instead we tend to see it as a humiliation - something to hide.

## \* NATURAL WISDOM \*

Idea of teaching yourself how to winter - because society won't

thru... \* I began to get a feel for my winterings. Their length and breadth, they left I know that they didn't last forever...

(convention...) We treat each wintering as an embarrassing anomaly that should be hidden or ignored — this means we've made a secret of an entirely ordinary process... those who endure it are forced to drop out of everyday life (pariahs) in order to conceal their "failure"

③

We do this at a GREAT COST

- ✓ Wintering brings out some of the most profound and insightful moments of our human experience
- ✓ Wisdom resides in those who have wintered.

In our relentlessly busy contemporary world, we are forever trying to defer the onset of winter.

We must stop believing that these times in our lives are somehow silly, a failure of nerve, or lack of willpower.


We must stop trying to ignore them or dispose of them (our wintering times)

they are REAL

And they are

ASKING something of us.

④

We MUST LEARN to INVITE THE WINTER IN 

We may never choose to winter, but we can choose how.

Wintering: 

It's one of the most important choices you'll ever make.

we are similar in our relationships to

WOW!  
connections between:

- ✓ older women
- ✓ natural world
- ✓ wintering
- ✓ unknown
- ✓ death + dying
- ✓ feminine
- ✓ doing + time
- ✓ producing

# WINTERING IS:

- ✓ a time of withdrawing from the world, maximizing <sup>scarce</sup> resources, carrying out acts of brutal efficiency and vanishing from sight
- ✓ where the transformation occurs (5)
- ✓ winter is <sup>NOT</sup> the death of the life cycle, but its crucible.
- ✓ It's a time of reflection and recuperation, for slow replenishment, for putting your house in order.

\* Doing those deeply unfashionable things—slowing down, letting your spare time expand, getting enough sleep, resting—is a radical act now, but it's essential.

\* ← Like Tiera

WINTER SAYS IN

This is a crossroads ← <sup>\*</sup>COVID  
we all know, a moment when you need to shed a skin.

✓ If you do, you'll expose all those painful nerve endings and feel so raw that you'll need to take care of yourself for a while. (6)

✓ If you don't that skin will harden around you.

It's one of the most important choices you'll ever make

Begins by disruption

✓ Conscious choice ← or unconscious

✓ Circumstances — sickness, job eliminated, care-taking

Brene Brown ♥

"You can either do vulnerability or wulnerability will do you."

Rest as Resistance

"Making ready"  
Finnish word Talvitehtat  
↳ "being stowed for winter"

# OCTOBER

I can feel  
the downturn  
coming.

I am determined to go into it consciously  
to make a practice in understanding  
myself better. I want to avoid making  
the same mistakes again. I'm almost  
wondering if there could be pleasure in it.

③ In winter, you're never more than a  
few steps from darkness

⑦ we bring light into the house to repel darkness

→ to make the house cheerful

← you have to find ways to keep cozy  
"Hygge"  
Danish

HOT WATER — it defrosts us.

(like wallowing in calm itself)

Heat is a blunt instrument, but warmth is relative. We feel warmer for knowing it's freezing outside.

THE BIVE LAGOON

That's what you learn in winter:  
there is a past, a present, and a  
future. There is a time after the  
aftermath.

# ER

Halloween is the border  
crossing into winter

In moments of helplessness, I always  
seem to travel north. — In the cold, I  
find I can think straight — the air  
feels clean + uncluttered. I have  
faith in the practicality of the north.  
Its ability to prepare + endure.

I love the revolutions that winter  
brings.

Halloween is an overturning of the  
natural order — a Celtic "thin place"  
where ghosts can easily seep  
through to present day.

Samhain — Gaelic pagan festival marking  
the arrival of the "dark half"  
of the year.

A LIMINAL MOMENT — Between the veil  
about to cross a boundary, but hadn't yet  
done so. Two phases between this  
world + the otherworld  
was at its thinnest  
Winter is a time when death  
comes the closest. We adults should  
learn to mark it

US GHOSTS  
2017  
⑧



# Metamorphosis

Winter has decorated ordinary life -  
sparkles, frost, puddles crisp with ice.  
↳ the cold renders everything exquisite

Transformation is the business of winter

**CAILLEACH** - In Gaelic mythology, the  
hag deity takes human form  
at Samhain to rule the  
winter months, bringing  
winds + wild weather.  
She is thought to be the mother  
of the gods, the groff cold  
originator of all things.

Her very  
steps  
change  
the land  
Her **(9)**  
reign lasts

1/1 (my birthday!)  
to 5/1 when Brighde  
"Green goddess" takes over

We are in the habit of  
imagining our lives to be  
linear. This is a brutal  
untruth

Trees: she knows what it  
is to cast off an old skin + grow a new  
In the absence of sunlight, it becomes one  
too costly to maintain the machinery of growth.

Cailleach +  
Brihad - 2 faces  
of same deity

↓  
Youth + vitality  
for summer  
⊕

Age + wisdom  
for winter

# NOVEMBER

# BER

The starkness  
of winter  
can reveal  
colors we would  
otherwise miss.

LOOSE  
EXPLORATORY  
READING

↳ reading to roam, not escape

"Night-waking" - it's  
normal to divide the  
night into 2 periods  
of sleep

1st "Dead Sleep"

The watch

2nd "Morning Sleep"

♥ The "inky hours"  
are also for writing

Sleep is not a dead  
space but a doorway  
to a different kind of  
consciousness.

The tree is waiting. It has  
everything already. It is far  
from dead. It is in fact the  
life and soul of the wood. It's  
just getting on with it quietly.

Winter is  
asking me  
to be more careful  
with my energies  
and to rest until  
Spring

HUMBLE  
POWER,  
Not  
SHOWY

10

↳ to rest well  
and feel  
restored, to  
retreat + be  
quietly separate

The Borderland  
↳ in the intimacy  
of the

darkness, we  
can hold rich  
wandering  
conversations,  
make love,  
pray, reflect

CONTEMPLATIVE  
CALM CLEAR  
CONNECTED

Industrial Revolution

Before the

♥

Light returns — <sup>Santa Lucia</sup> ritual — DECEMBER

→ sitting quietly in a church has done me good. → she brought a little light — just enough to see by.

MID-WINTER SOLSTICE

the year is reborn again every year at solstice.

offers a way through the darkness, this pattern

wintering is a moment of intuition, our true needs felt keenly as a knife

Happiness is the greatest skill we'll ever learn. But if happiness is a skill, then sadness is, too.

\* AS adults, we often have to learn to hear the clarity of its call \*

Rituals are doors to the psyche — between the sacred + the profane, the purity + the dirt, beauty + ugliness — and an opening out of the ORDINARY into the EXTRAORDINARY

A VOICELESS AWE AT THE PASSING OF TIME (12)

The way everything changes. The way everything stays the same. The way those things are bigger than I am, and move than I can hold.

"we have turned the year" — with or without our noticing — but gives us fleeting impression we have control.

\* That is \* our response ✓ It's the courage to stare down the worst parts — to heal ✓ it's an active acceptance of sadness

Winterring ✓ It's the practice of allowing ourselves to feel it as needed.



Norway - "the polar night" - where the sun doesn't rise at all

JAN

There was \*MAGIC\* \*Everywhere

Sleeping in all that darkness was easy - lulled by the endless midwinter beige - and honestly it made for a pleasant change from being exhausted all the time.

Aurora borealis

WOLVES

Extraordinary things can flourish in the dark, cold polar night, but no matter how hard I tried to fight them, I simply had no defense against change - I was missing my antlers

I am a wolf, overcome by the need to howl, to go outside and stalk about my territory.

THE CALL OF THE WILD

A seething mess of uncertainty  
A mind full of forked paths  
I want to be everything, but I am nothing

Jan = Wolf  
Full Moon  
Moon  
↑  
Driven by Hunger

In the depths of our winters, we are ALL WOLFISH - we WANT in order to be whole again.

JANUARY

I am an empty bowl, concave

Fleeting  
Nothing showy, obvious or demanding  
they hide from you at first, and then they whisper to you.

There is an unrest in my gut that feels like hunger

♡  
The reindeer understood what was necessary to get through winter  
I did ♡  
Not.

the connection between BEAUTY + HARDINESS

Working hard to maintain their connection to the sublime (like swimming in unthinkably cold fjords :))

Reindeer - were wilder than I expected (14)

The females, or cows, shed their antlers on a different cycle (then males)

↓ ↓ ↓ ↓  
that means that the rugged antler deer were all female, wearing their resilience like a crown.

"you do not have your antlers. Mama reindeer, so we must fill you up with soup instead."



The nostalgia of snow

I love the inconvenience and the irresistible disruption of the mundane, forcing you to stop for a while and step outside your normal habits.

In the snow, time has lost its linearity, and deep history is present

GUSTAWING WHITESPACE

Winter is full of these

Fleeting invitations to step out of the ordinary

NARNIA

there's no doubt we are supposed to perceive the White Witch's evil, but neither can we fail to perceive her glamour.

FEBRUARY

Snow creates that quality of awe in the face of a power greater than ours

Snow vanquishes the mundane

Spontaneous tables are turned wild + yet cosy rebellious + heart warming

LIMINAL SPACE

A crossing point between the mundane and the MAGICAL

this book rings with the pleasure of snow

the Lion, the Witch + the wardrobe Here's is an icy beauty, sharp, crystalline

immersion in COLD WATER

crystalline seconds of intense cold - my blood sparkled in my veins.

I had to adapt. I had to surrender.

It was the COLD she was craving rather than the comforting heat

It's like a switch has been flicked. It's a physical thing.

I'm treating my brain like an inflamed joint

Something was happening to her brain that made her feel CALM and CLEAR

We are completely enchanted by our own bravery. I can show my skin to the sea and feel like I'm part of its elemental power

Let in all the light that reflects from the snow cover - all of life becomes focused on letting the outside world in, rather than keeping it out

By embracing winter, rather than trying to push it away, I found a way to move forward

the only thing breaking me was pretending to be like everybody else

16



Honeybees as "wintering machines"

A colony is a superorganism. They act as ONE.

Most of a bee's activity is directed toward the colony surviving winter.

Half the year preparing for it → Half the year living it

Bees achieve this carefully balanced social order by behaving like cells in a larger body - that's exactly what a hive does - it keeps itself alive.

(17)

such a metaphor!

HONEY FUELS THE WHOLE PROCESS

Winter is a time for the quiet arts of making

✓ chewing over concepts by candlelight

Winter OPENS UP time

✓ slow spiritual reading, reinforcement of the soul.

I can spend hours in silent pursuit of a half-understood concept or a detail...

puzzles, knitting, restoring, reading, baking, repairing

Approach it like a SONG

MA RCH

The instinct to keep your HANDS moving

SONG

Robins are associated with winter

Winter is for women

↳ A time when the feminine arts come into their own

→ It feels good to be making something, even while my contribution to the world feels very small.

It allows me to imagine I'm part of the machine.

See ↔ HIVE

(18)

A PRACTICE FOR HAPPIER TIMES

↳ A robin sings in winter because she can.

Singing with others is a kind of alchemy - an act of expansive magic in which you lose yourself and become part of the whole. (WOMEN'S VOICES)

I had lost my voice. It was just something that happened alongside all the other things that obliterated my sense of being a relevant presence in the world... It was there, it just needed some to slide into it sideways rather than tackle it head on. My middle C was in hiding (as a metaphor)

# WINTER OFFERINGS. ♡

(19)

Over and over again, we find that winter offers us liminal spaces to inhabit. Yet still, we refuse them. The work of the cold season is to learn to welcome them.

We are pushing away this innate skill we have for digesting the difficult parts of life

FINDING WINTER (and accepting its invitations) is like FINDING A HIDDEN DOOR (the stuff of dreams)



More than anything, season, WINTER requires a kind of metronome that ticks away its darkest beats, giving us a melody to follow into Spring.

Winter is a moment of intuition — our true needs felt keenly, like a knife.

\* Life is bloody unfair, but it makes us more kind.

When you start tuning into winter, you realize that we live through a thousand winters in our lives — some big, some small

Some winters are gradual. Some winters creep up on us so slowly that they have infiltrated every part of our lives before we truly feel them. ♡ "Remapping" ourselves

In winter, transformation happens when everything is broken, every- (20) thing is on its up for grabs. That's the gift of winter: it's irresistible. Change will happen in its wake, whether we like it or not. We can come out of it wearing a different coat.

You'll find wisdom in your winter. And in return, it's our responsibility to listen to those who have wintered before us. It's an exchange of gifts in which nobody loses out. ♡

Watching winter we learn that effect is often disproportionate, to cause that it carries on with or without us.