

IKON

Six Lockdown Walks



Artist John Newling and writer Alys Fowler exchange letters on their daily walks, through residential areas and open spaces in Nottingham and Birmingham. Reflecting on the pattern language of these environs and their own behaviours, some happy accidents and moments of connection occur.

Letter: 6/6

From: Alys Fowler

Date: Tuesday 12 May

Time: 12pm

Weather: Dull, cold

Subject: Same old, same old

Dear John,

I found a hole in the road and peered in on your behalf. I guess that hole is going to be there for a long while to come. It was the start of some big works, for pipes or perhaps wires, but now abandoned. I pondered the thin veneer of concrete and all the layers. In this part of the world, you don't have to dig very far to come to that blue-orange smear of pure clay; good enough to make the bricks of the city. I had half a mind to come back at night and plant a tree in the middle of the road to see what might happen. I haven't though.

Instead I've been battling a migraine that crept in after breakfast, halfway through the first draft of an interview, and has lodged itself for the day. I've pruned its ambition with painkillers, but that just leaves the odd sensation of the space the pain occupies. Like the ghost of the headache and the strange auras that come with it.

Thus, it has been a very slow walk today, wrapped up in a jumper, cardigan and woolly hat, to go check on the pumpkins. They are none too pleased to be in the polytunnel under additional layers of fleece, bubblewrap and a plastic sheet. However, this is in preparation for tonight's frost, which may well be worse than last's night version that left the garden dusted in a layer of white and took a few nasturtiums with it.

Still, this is the stuff of May, the in/out of tender things as you try and acclimatise them. Strange weather for strange times. In/out, in/out, shake it all about.

On the way back from the allotment I graze. I find this one of the most satisfying ways to forage, nibbling here and there, turning back on the path if my body enjoys a particular flavour. I have a round of garlic mustard tops, the last few flowers and the first new seed pods. Sweet, garlicky-mustard and tempered from the bitterness of a few weeks ago. Then I eat some of the younger leaves of the second generation. Hot and peppery. From there, I nibble on a few birch leaves and have a good fill on young lime leaves before happening on a pretty little hawthorn, catching a beam through a gap in the canopy left by a fallen poplar. Hawthorn is at its best as medicine right now. There are the flowers, which can be dried for tea, or the lovely young leaves, so sweet and nutty.

I eat a handful of leaves and realise my body wants more, so go on a hunt for another to sample. Hawthorn is good for your heart; it aids the circulation of blood and is often used, particularly on the Continent, as a prescribed prevention for cardiovascular diseases. It's said to also help the uneasiness and oppressed feeling of the heart, opening it up both physically and metaphysically. I eat another handful.

Tomorrow, when this headache has gone, I'll come back and pick the hawthorn flowers, some for drying for tea and some for dyeing. They produce lovely delicate yellows on silk. Ele has a shirt she wants to wear for the wedding that has a huge hole on the sleeve, so I've decided to dye some silk to patch it up. I like the idea of her wearing the heart plant on her sleeve.

Best wishes to you and stay strong and well

Alys xx

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