

You don't seem to have the same vibe as you had before,' said Lori sitting down opposite me.

She was right. I was tired after my week back at work. Part of me was thinking 'would Lori like the random recipe generator,' and part of me was thinking 'is it too late to cancel Geoff?'

'Maybe it's because you're no longer plotting against my bamboo,' she laughed.

'Oh, but I am.'

'Glad to hear it.'

'The challenges of getting rid of it occupied my thoughts all the way from Southampton to Waterloo. Up to Winchester I was thinking 'just cut it down,' but then it would grow back, you'd have to keep cutting it down.'

'How often?' Lori leant back in her chair and sipped her tea thoughtfully.

'Weekly.'

'No way I'd keep that up, a few busy weeks at work and I'd forget.'

'It would take a good year. It would require commitment and patience.' I held her gaze, hoping she would understand that I was thinking long term.

She nodded solemnly.

'So from Winchester to Basingstoke I thought about herbicide...'

'But..?'

'But although it's quick, it would pollute the surrounding area so I'd like to avoid it.'

'Okay,' she clasped her tea, holding my gaze long enough for me to notice the hazel flecks in her eyes. The cares of the week fell away and that feeling I always had at her kitchen table returned. The feeling of being completely and utterly in the here and now, of having all the time in the world, thinking only of her, and her garden.

'I plotted, Lori, all the way to Woking. I'd want to go all the way and pull it up by the roots. Oh yes! And I'd take out the Cherry Laurel too. Then...' I took a sip of my tea and gazed at the garden visible through the patio doors. 'This took me all the way to Waterloo – I'd plant a beautiful Guelder Rose and a Dog Rose too, a lovely native rose, with a wonderful scent. The hoverflies would love that, and they'd eat the aphids.'

'I love roses.'

'Then we'd have to choose - a Buddleia for the butterflies, or a native Wayfarer tree. They add colour and have berries that birds absolutely love, especially the song thrush.'

'We hardly see them anymore,' she smiled into my eyes.

'I may even allow a Ceanothus. They're not native...'

‘Not native!’ she cried, aghast, gently teasing.

‘...but the pollinators will love them.’

‘That would provide a lovely splash of blue.’

‘And if I take out your Cherry Laurel too, we’d have room for a Blackthorn.’

‘What are they like?’

‘They produce sloes.’

‘As in sloe gin?’ Her eyes lit up.

‘Yep.’

‘I’d love to be drinking sloe gin right now.’

‘Me too.’

‘Then you shall.’

‘It would take a season or two.’ I warned her.

Lori shrugged, indicating she was prepared to wait.

I contemplated the following Christmas, the sweet, heady taste of sloe gin, going a little to our heads in the cosy kitchen, the warmth of the alcohol in our blood.

Sounds from upstairs disturbed the intimate air. Ethan bounded into the kitchen and stopped abruptly at the sight of Lori and I drinking tea.

We watched as the basic social norm of not killing an innocent man battled with the urge to jump on me and pummel me to death with extreme prejudice. The outcome was uncertain. I held my ground. The electricity in the air suddenly lost its charge as Ethan muttered something that seemed to contain the word ‘bat box.’