


The Bleak Midwinter



By Carole Ogden

On Boxing Day Lydia woke up at 6am promptly. Even though she had retired many years ago it seemed to be a habit she had never been able to break. She lay for a moment in silence. No sounds from the kitchen or David's beautiful tenor voice chorusing "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" Rising, she shrugged on her dressing gown and pulled back the curtains. It was not a beautiful morning anyway, she thought, it was cold, grey and lifeless. Again.

Shaking herself, she marched decisively to the wardrobe, opening the door wide – she had been unable to face his things before, but a nagging little voice in her head today was challenging her to face her demons: bring it on, she thought angrily. Time stopped for a moment as she surveyed David's neatly arranged clothes, as though still waiting for him.

Breaking the spell, a feather fluttered down, landing on the bottom shelf. Instinctively she bent to clear it up and, as she reached out, her fingers touched something unexpectedly smooth and shiny. Sliding it forward, she saw a box, beautifully wrapped in Christmas paper. Her breath caught in her chest at her name on the label, in David's familiar flowing script. After a moment's hesitation, she lifted it up and carried it to the kitchen table.

There had been a sharp frost but she could see no beauty, only stillness, emptiness and a tangle of bare branches. She had always hated winter, longing for the colour and clamour of summer flowers that they had tended together. Sighing, she sat down and nervously opened the box.

Of course David had planned well ahead, she was the one always on the last minute, and this year she had not bothered with Christmas at all. Their daughter, Amy, had planned to visit, and discussions had become quite heated, but she had insisted that she was on her own now and needed to get used to it.

Inside the box was a bag of bird food, together with David's binoculars and bird book. She held it close to her. On the front page there was a dedication: 'Lydia – always remember, there are other worlds to sing in xxx'.



Her eyes brimmed with tears. The bird feeders had remained empty since David was no longer in his chair by the patio doors, where he had spent so many happy hours.

The birds didn't deserve to suffer from her mood, she thought, so she filled the feeders and rinsed out the bird bath. The next morning, when she went into the kitchen, the garden was a riot of colour and movement. Birds of all types seemed to be queueing up on the branches to get to the feeder, and their chirrups and trills were enough to warm even the coldest heart. A perky robin held her gaze.

She sighed, and picked up the phone. "Amy love, it's mum. Do you fancy seeing in the New Year with me?"

