

## The Light in the Dark: A Winter Journal

**Horatio Clare**

Elliott and Thompson (Oct 1, 2020)

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"If it were followed by spring or summer, I would love autumn unreservedly," writes Horatio Clare. Instead, autumn, for all its glory, warns the Welsh-born writer that winter will soon engulf Britain and Wales in gales, sleet, and unrelenting gloom.

In winter, Clare writes, a kind of madness descends upon him. Incapable of writing, he fears being unable to support his family, becoming derelict, and losing the house. Swearing to make one year different, Clare, who commuted twice a week from St. David's, Britain's smallest city, to Liverpool to teach creative writing, decided to keep a journal—a torch raised against the darkness, his commitment to pay attention and embrace winter's gifts.

Still, the combination of isolation, cold, and country rigors in a sunless land almost felled him. "Depression kills your power of vision, turning you fatally towards yourself," and this turning, difficult as it was, brought truth and personal salvation.

With poetic turns and unforgettable images, as of "pigeons riding the gales like fat darts" and "bracken-red ridges ... surfac[ing] through pearlescent cloud, heaving up like whales," the book is sensitive and deep, heart-rending and comforting, like hearth-warmed woolens. Stories of welcoming pubs that serve up "battered fish that looks like you could club a cat with it," local wildlife, and Clare's mother's hilly Welsh farm where the sheep frost in place are shared. And then, in the heart of the winter, Clare finds that "Of all the seasons, winter draws us together ... Its legacy will not be a shadow, but a flame." His inspired journal is a testament to the challenges of the season and a declaration of hope that people are made better for having learned winter's hard, but necessary, lessons.

KRISTINE MORRIS (November / December 2020)

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