

In the garden with Shobha Vanchiswar



December 10, 2010

Escaping the Madness

Is it just me, or do you also feel a bit overwhelmed this month?

It's crazy enough dealing with year-end deadlines: planning the upcoming school break, writing greeting cards, attending recitals, entertaining visiting relatives, attending parties, creating teacher gifts, trimming a tree and preparing holiday food.

But, the media would have us feel positively inadequate if we aren't in the thick of mega-shopping sprees, dressing with sparkle appropriate for a disco ball, decorating the home like there was no tomorrow, etc. It is just absurd, right? In the spirit of giving, let me share with you my solution. Do give it a try. You have nothing to lose but stress.

Withdraw into the garden (no one will look for you there!)

In the interest of keeping my sanity, I withdraw into the garden. Don't worry, nobody will join you since it's so cold outside and they're afraid you might put them to work. They don't need to know that there are no chores. Now is the time when the garden repays for all the care lavished on it throughout the year. It just lets me be. With cup of hot coffee or tea in hand, I step into this place and suddenly all the noises (literal and metaphorical) of the moment cease. It is refreshingly quiet. I can hear myself think.

I take a deep breath and stroll around. The crisp air pushes away the cobwebs in my head. One by one, I let go of the items on my to-do list. Everything can wait. Before I know it, I'm no longer thinking about what was till recently so urgent. Instead, I'm taking in the beauty of the garden at rest. I study the "bones" of the garden and appreciate the structure. I take in the muted colors of wood and stone. The rose hips glitter in the sun like carnelians. Tipped with diamond dust frost, the as-yet emerald green grass spreads out like a magic carpet.

I admire the sturdy nest built so diligently by the robins last spring. It sits high in the rose arbor, so exposed and empty now. I wonder if the robins will move in again next year. The tissue-paper petals of the drying hydrangea blossoms dance in the breeze like minuscule prayer flags. The soft rustle they

make sounds like the whispered prayers of monks. Instinctively, I let the tension in my shoulders melt away.

My feathered friends smooth my ruffled feathers

Pausing near the bird feeder, I watch the feathered ones. The cardinals seem to visit in pairs and is it my imagination that the male resplendent in bright red actually waits for its mate to eat first? The blue jays provide contrasting color and behavior. Their manners are not so refined. Meanwhile, the chickadees and sparrows dart to and fro sneaking deftly between their larger friends. Several other birds wait their turn on the sugar maple nearby. They sit pretty like ornaments. Gazing upwards, my eyes trace the filigree patterns of the bare limbs of trees against the azure blue sky. I imagine painting such a design on a bedroom ceiling.

From the corner of my eye, I spy something in bright pink at the base of an azalea. Wondering if it is a brave, but misguided cyclamen, I investigate. It's only a plastic egg still awaiting discovery from last Easter's egg hunt. Inside it, nestles a tiny crystal heart. I put it back for a child to find next year.

The cup in my hand has grown cold. Likewise, my hands are beginning to feel like marble. But deep inside, I am warm and empowered. My spiritual well has been replenished. I make my way back to the house. I am now clear about what I need to do and which demands will go ignored. I give silent thanks to the garden for giving me back my perspective. Once again, it has gently informed the landscape of my mind.







