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Rain At Last

We have had several months of heatwave in the UK. The word suggests a short period of unusually high temperatures, but this was not a single wave, like a passing wave on the sea, but we were living at the bottom of a sea of hot humid air, with little movement to provide relief. Last week we went to Hastings, a seaside town on the south coast. Despite the very hot weather, it was also very windy, with the grey foamy waves whipped up, some with tops breaking before reaching the shore, and crashing on the steep shelving stony beach. This meant I could not test the water with my finger or toe, but I am reasonably sure it would have been as cold as it normally is, especially as the water is not shallow there. Although the seafront was windy, in town it was still meltingly hot.

Now the oppressive heat and humidity have come to an end, at least for the time being. Two days ago we had the first rain in a long time. The wind freshened and the western horizon became darker and darker. When I heard the distant rumblings of thunder, I put away the parasols and removed the shading covers from the at-risk plants. Circles began appearing on the pond, the first hint of rain when it is too light to be felt on the face. Within a few seconds they had become large drops dotting the paving, a very welcome decorative addition to the plain grey stones. Within a couple of minutes the rain was heavy and noisy, with lightning, thunder and strong gusty winds bending the trees. The downpour was soon pounding on the roof and windows, and running in rivers down the garden path. The goldfish were darting around the pond, surprised by the sudden disturbance and also expecting a new supply of insects and flies to be washed in for them to eat. Water was rushing down the road gutters sweeping away the debris, and all the paths and cars suddenly became gleaming clean.

I stood in it, when it first started, and took a smiling selfie against a background of dripping greenery. I took photos and videos to capture the flashes of lightning and thunder. The pattering of the rain and the pounding giant drops and splashes were longed-for but almost forgotten sounds. A small waterfall was streaming from the end of the guttering and landing noisily on the aluminium ladder directly beneath, making a tinny drumming sound as it hit the metal. In a similar storm some years ago I placed a thick wad of newspaper on the ladder to reduce the noise of the endless drips, and found next morning that the paper had become a mass of pulp that resembled cooked oatmeal, with a neat curved splash shape of soggy lumps on the ground below.

Now, two days later, the rain has returned, but more gentle, like we are used to, and hopefully this will be prolonged enough to refresh our surroundings and revive the plants sufficiently to see them through the remainder of summer in August and September. It will soak into the soil properly and soften it, rather than running off and disappearing down the drain without doing any good. I will also welcome the longer periods of rain in winter as that is when the ground water and reservoirs are replenished to see us through any dry times next summer. (577 words)
