

Snowdrop Kingdom

i.m James Allen of Shepton Mallet

At night he dreamed of their dancing,
their ovaries and stamens racing.

By day, they never so much as blushed
under his soily hands as he unlocked

the key to their urge to multiply,
varied their height and their secret

petticoats with the green signature
of a cloven foot, a heart or a kiss.

Nor when he slit open their seed pods
and tipped the glitter of their pearls

into home-made compost,
patting it firm with a fingertip.

Nor when he divided their bulblets
with the blade of his father's old penknife

and tamped their tender cuts into his medium
in clay pots arrayed in the cold-frames.

He conjured drifts and falls,
could turn a lawn into a shawl of stars

lit their tiny lanterns through the night,
spirited up gists of hope

for he was *the snowdrop king* –
and all he touched became *Galanthus*.

He named them all.
Near the end he and the drops

grew hoary together
and a smoke settled inside them

furring their spines,
each smothered in ash.

Rebecca Gethin, Newton Abbot