

THE
**CANADIAN
MAGAZINE**



"WELL, IT IS ALL OVER, BUT I THINK
I HAVE DONE MY DUTY"

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A Garden of Old Delights

L. M. Montgomery

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What wonder that wise old Eden story placed the beginning of life in a garden? A garden fitly belongs to the youth of the world and the youth of the race, for it never grows old. The years, which steal so much from everything else, bring added loveliness and sweetness to it, enriching it with memories beautiful and tender, but never blighting its immortal freshness. It is foolishness to speak as we do of "old" gardens: gardens are perennially young, the haunt of flowers and children. And Grandmother's garden was always full of both.

Some of her many grandchildren always came to the old homestead for their summer holidays. One summer there were a half-dozen there as guests; and, counting the other ten who lived near her and spent more time at grandmother's than at their own homes, we were the merriest little crew in the world. The garden was our favourite haunt, and we passed most of our waking moments there. It was to us an enchanted pleasure-ground, and there is nothing in all our store of remembrance so sweet and witching as our recollections of it. Places visited in later years have grown dim and indistinct, but every nook and corner of grandmother's garden is as vivid in memory as on the day I saw it last. That was many years ago; but I could go straight with shut eyes at this very moment to the bed beside the snowball tree where the first violets grew.

The door of the big living-room opened directly into the garden. You went down four wide shallow steps, formed of natural slabs of red sandstone which great-grandfather had brought up from the shore. The lower one was quite sunk into the earth, and mint grew thickly about its edges. Often crushed by so many little feet, it gave out its essence freely and the spicy odour always hung around that door like an invisible benediction.

The garden was long and narrow and sloped slightly to the west. On two sides it was surrounded by a high stone wall; at least, we thought it high; but I have a mature suspicion that I might not think so now. Things have such an unwholesome habit of dwindling as we grow older; but then we could barely see over it by standing on tiptoe, and we had to climb to its top by the little ladder fastened against the western end if we wanted to get a good view of the wide, sloping green fields beyond, and the sea calling so softly on its silvery, glistening sand shore.

The third side was shut in by the house itself, a long, quaint, whitewashed building, lavishly festooned with Virginia creeper and climbing roses. Something about the five square windows in the second storey gave it an appearance of winking at us in a friendly fashion through its vines; at least, so the story-girl said; and, indeed, we could always see it for ourselves after she had once pointed it out to us.

At one corner of the house a little gate opened into the kitchen garden, where

the vegetables grew; but we never felt much interest in that—perhaps because grandmother’s old servant Jean looked upon it as her special domain and discouraged intruders.

“Get awa’ wi’ ye into the floor garden—that’s the proper place for bairns,” she would say, with an instinctive perception of the fitness of things.

The fourth side was rimmed in by a grove of fir trees, a dim, cool place where the winds were fond of purring, and where there was always a resinous, woodsy odour. On the farther side of the firs was a thick plantation of slender silver birches and whispering poplars; and just beyond it what we called the “wild garden”—a sunny triangle shut in by the meadow fences and as full of wild flowers as it could hold: blue and white violets, dandelions, Junebells, wild-roses, daisies, buttercups, asters, and goldenrod, all lavish in their season.

The garden was intersected by right-angled paths, bordered by the big white clam-shells which were always found in abundance by the bay, and laid with gravel from the shore—coloured pebbles and little white shells well ground into the soil. In the beds between the paths and around the wall grew all the flowers in the world, or so, at least, we used to think. The same things were always found in the same place; we always looked for the clove pinks, sown in grandmother’s bridal days, behind the big waxberry bush, and the shadowy corner behind the sumacs was always sweet in spring with white narcissus.

There were many roses, of course, roses that grew without any trouble and flung a year’s hoarded sweetness into luxuriant bloom every summer. One never heard of mildew or slugs or aphids there, and nothing was ever done to the rose-bushes beyond a bit of occasional pruning. There was a row of big double pink ones at one side of the front door, and the red and white ones grew in the middle plot. There was one yellow rose-tree to the left of the steps; but the ones we loved best were the dear little “Scotch roses”—oh, how fragrant and dainty and thorny were those wee semi-double roses with their waxen outer petals and the faint shell-pink of their hearts! Jean had brought the rose-bush with her all the way from an old Scottish garden when she was a “slip of a lassie,” so that in our eyes there was a touch of romance about them that the other roses lacked.

Grandmother’s bed of lavender and caraway and sweet clover was very dear to her heart. The caraway and sweet clover had a tendency to spread wildly, and it was one of our duties to keep them in proper bounds, rooting up every stray bit that straggled from the allotted space. We picked and dried the lavender for grandmother’s linen closet; and she made us delicious caraway cookies such as I have never eaten anywhere else. I am afraid such cookies are not made nowadays.

All the beds were edged with ribbon grass. The big red peonies grew along the edge of the fir grove, splendid against its darkness, and the hollyhocks stood up in stiff ranks by the kitchen garden gate. The bed next to them was a sight to see when the yellow daffodils and tulips came out. There was a clump of tiger-lilies before the door and a row of madonna-lilies farther down. One big pine tree grew in the garden, and underneath it was a stone bench, made, like the steps, of flat shore stones worn smooth by the long polish of wind and wave. Just behind this bench grew pale, sweet flowers which had no name that we could ever find out. Nobody seemed to know anything about them. They had been there when grandfather's father bought the place. I have never seen them elsewhere or found them described in any catalogue. We called them the White Ladies—the Story Girl gave them the name. She said they looked like the souls of good women. They were very ærial and wonderfully dainty, with a strange, haunting perfume that was only to be detected at a little distance and vanished if you bent over them. They faded whenever they were plucked, and although strangers, greatly admiring them, often carried away roots and seeds they could never be coaxed to grow elsewhere.

There was one very old-fashioned bed full of bleeding hearts, Sweet William, bride's bouquet, butter-and-eggs, Adam-and-Eve, columbines, pink and white daisies, and Bouncing Bets. We liked this bed best, because we might always pluck the flowers in it whenever we pleased. For the others, we had to ask permission, which, however, was seldom refused.

Poppies were the only things in the garden with a license to ramble. They sprang up everywhere; but the bed of them was in the northwest corner, and there they shook out their fringed silken skirts against a low coppice of young firs. Asparagus, permitted because of the feathery grace of its later development, grew behind the well-house, near the lilies-of-the-valley; the middle path was spanned at regular intervals by three arches, and these were garlanded with honeysuckle.

The well-house was a quaint, lichened old structure built over the well at the bottom of the garden. Four posts supported an odd peaked little roof like the roof of a Chinese pagoda, and it was almost covered with vines that hung from it in long swinging festoons nearly to the ground. The well was very deep and dark, and the water, drawn up by a windlass and chain in a mossy old bucket shaped like a little barrel and bound with icy hoops, was icy cold. As far down as we could see, the walls of the well were grown over with the most beautiful ferns.

The garden was full of birds; some of them we regarded as old friends, for they nested in the same place every year and never seemed afraid of us. A pair of bluebirds had an odd liking for a nook in the stonework of the well; two

yellowhammers had preëmpted an old hollow poplar in the south-western corner. Wild canaries set up housekeeping in the big lilac bush before the parlour windows. One exciting summer a pair of hummingbirds built a nest in the central honeysuckle arch. A wild August gale and rainstorm tore it from its frail hold and dashed it to the ground, where we found it the next morning. We girls cried over it; and then we cast lots to decide who should have the wonderful thing, fashioned of down and lichen, and no bigger than a walnut. The hummingbirds never came back, though we looked wistfully for them every summer. Robins were numerous, especially in early spring, great, sleek, saucy fellows, strutting along the paths. In the summer evenings after sunset they would whistle among the firs, making sweet, half melancholy music.

A garden with so many years behind it would naturally have some legends of its own. There was one fascinating story about “the poet who was kissed.” One long-ago day, so long ago that grandfather was only a little boy, a young man had come into this garden—one whose name had already begun to bud out with the garland of fame that later encrowned it. He went into the garden to write a poem, and fell asleep with his head pillowed on the old stone bench. Into the garden came great-aunt Alice, who was nobody’s aunt then, but a laughing-eyed girl of eighteen, red of lip and dark of hair, wilful and sweet, and a wee bit daring. She had been away and had just come home, and she knew nothing at all of her brother’s famous guest; but in the garden, fast asleep under the pine tree, with his curly head on the hard stones and his half-finished poem beside him was the handsomest youth she had ever seen.

Mischievous Alice took him for an unexpected cousin from Scotland, and, bending over until her long dark curls swept his shoulder, she dropped a kiss, light and dainty as a falling rose-petal, on his sunburned cheek. Then he opened his big blue eyes and looked into Alice’s blushing face—blushing hotly, for she realised all at once that this could not be the Scotch cousin. She knew, for she had been told, that *he* had eyes as velvet brown as her own. Fair Alice sprang to her feet and fled through the garden in dire confusion—a confusion which was not mended any when she found out who the sleeping prince really was. But it all ended happily, as one would expect, in wedding-bells for Alice and her poet.

The story which had the greatest fascination for us was that of “The Lost Diamond.” Soon after grandfather and grandmother were married a certain great lady had come to visit them, a lady on whose white, highbred hand sparkled a diamond ring. She had gone to walk in the garden; the diamond was in the ring when she went down the sandstone steps, for grandmother noted its sparkle as the great lady lifted her silken gown; but when she came in again the setting was empty and the diamond gone. Nor was it ever found, then or afterwards, search as they might.

And never was anything better searched for. This story had a perennial charm for us children; we always had a secret hope that we might find the stone, and it made our labours seem light indeed. Nobody objected to pulling up weeds when every pull stood the chance of being rewarded by the starry glitter of the lost gem.

And then our garden had its ghost. We children were not supposed to know anything about this—grandmother thought it would frighten us and had forbidden any allusion to it in our presence. Her precaution was useless, for we knew all about it—the Story Girl had told us. How the Story Girl knew it I cannot say; but the legend did not frighten us at all. Instead, we were intensely interested and very proud of it. Not every garden had a ghost. So it seemed to confer a certain distinction on ours. We never saw our ghost, but that was not for lack of looking for it.

The legend, as related to us one misty twilight by the Story Girl, and told in whispers with furtive glances backward that rendered it very impressive—oh, she knew how to tell a story, that Girl—was as follows:

Long ago, even before grandfather was born, an orphaned cousin of his lived with his parents. Her name was Edith and she was small and sweet and wistful eyed, with very long sleek brown curls and a tiny birthmark like a pink butterfly right on one oval cheek. She had a lover, the young son of a neighbour, and one day he had told her shyly that he was coming on the morrow to ask her a very important question and he wanted to find her in the garden when he came. Edith promised to meet him at the old stone bench; and on the morrow she dressed herself in her pale blue muslin and sleeked her curls and waited smiling at the trysting spot. To her there came a heedless cousin bursting out boyishly that her lover had been killed that morning by the accidental discharge of his gun. Edith was never quite herself after that; and she was never contented unless she was dressed in her blue gown and sitting on the old bench waiting for him—because he would be sure to come sometime, she said. She grew paler every day, but the little pink butterfly grew redder until it looked like a stain of blood against the whiteness of her face. When the winter came she died, but the next summer it began to be whispered about that Edith was sometimes seen sitting on the bench, waiting. More than one person had seen her.

“Grandfather saw her when he was a little boy,” said the Story Girl, nodding mysteriously. “And my mother saw her once, too, only once.”

“Did *you* ever see her?” the skeptical boy wanted to know.

The Story-Girl shook her head.

“No, but I shall some day, if I keep on believing,” she said confidently.

“I wouldn’t like to see her—I should be afraid,” said the timid girl, with a little

shiver.

“There wouldn’t be anything to be afraid of,” said the Story Girl reassuringly. “It’s not as if it were a stranger ghost. It’s our own family ghost, so, of course, it wouldn’t hurt us.”

We often “acted out” the story of Alice and her poet; we discovered the lost diamond in a thousand different ways and places; but we never acted the story of Edith. Ghosts are not chancy folk to meddle with—even when they are your own family ghosts.

We had our own games and sports, mostly original, for the Story-Girl could invent them more easily than most children could talk. Our playhouse was in the fir grove. We had shelves on the trees covered with a dazzling array of broken dishes and pieces of coloured glass; and we had “cupboards” scooped out among the big roots and lined with moss. We wove wreaths and crowns of pink daisies and every girl was queen for a day, turn about. We had picnics and little festivals galore. But when all was said and done we liked best to hear the Story-Girl tell stories.

We would climb to the top of the western wall, or sit on the grass under the swinging fir boughs, and listen for hours. The Story-Girl was an orphan grandchild who had always lived at grandmother’s. She was a slim, light-footed thing, with an oval brown face and large, dark-blue, dreamy eyes. She had a marvellous memory and a knack of dramatic word-painting. Half her stories she “made out of her own head,” and we thought them wonderful. Even now I still think they *were* wonderful, and if she had lived I believe the world would have heard of her. She died in her early teens in a foreign land, far away from her beloved garden. It was she kept the “garden book.” I found it in a box in the attic the last time I was at the old homestead, and brought it away with me. Many of its entries made the past seem the present again:

April twentieth.

It is spring, and I am so glad. The beauty of winter is that it makes you appreciate spring. Little green things are poking up everywhere in the garden. I always run out first thing every morning to see how much they have grown since yesterday. I helped grandmother plant the sweet peas to-day and I planted a little bed of my own. I am not going to dig them up this year to see if they have sprouted. It is bad for them. I am going to try to cultivate patience.

I read a new fairy book in the fir grove to-day. A fir grove is the right kind of a place to read fairy stories. Sally says she can’t see that it makes

any difference where you read them, but, oh, it does.

May tenth.

Warm, with south wind. Grandmother and Jean finished planting the vegetable garden to-day. I never like the vegetable garden except when I am hungry. Then I do like to go and look at the nice little rows of onions and beets.

May twenty-eighth.

I was busy weeding all day. Sally and Jack came over and helped me. I don't mind weeding but I always feel so sorry for the poor weeds. It must be hard to be rooted up; but then you should not grow in the wrong place. I suppose if weeds ever get to heaven they will be flowers. I hope heaven will be all flowers. I think I could be always good if I lived in a garden all the time. But then Adam and Eve lived in a garden and they were not always good—far from it.

June eighth.

It rained this morning. The garden is always so sweet after a rain. Everything is so fresh and clean and the perfumes are lovelier than ever. I wish one could see perfumes as well as smell them. I am sure they would be beautiful. Billy says it is just like a girl to wish something silly! Billy is very practical—he would never think of being sorry for the weeds. Grandfather says he is very level-headed. It is best to be level-headed, of course, but you miss lots of fun.

Our Canterbury-Bells are out. I think "Canterbury-Bells" is a lovely name. It makes you think of cathedrals. Sweet William is a dreadful name for a flower. William is a man's name, and men are never sweet. They are a great many admirable things, but they are not sweet and shouldn't be. That is for women.

June seventeenth.

The garden does not look the same by moonlight at all. It is very beautiful but it is different. When I was a little wee girl I used to believe that fairies danced in the garden by moonlight. I would like to believe it still, but it is so hard to believe things you know are not true. Uncle James told me there were no such things as fairies. He is a minister, so, of course, I knew he spoke the truth. It was his duty to tell me and I do not blame him, but I have never felt quite the same to Uncle James since.

We acted Alice and the poet to-day. I like it mostly, but not to-day, for Billy was the poet and he didn't look a bit poetical—his face was so

round and freckled. I just wanted to laugh and that spoiled it all for me. I always like it better when Jack is the poet; he looks the part and he never screws his eyes up as tight as Billy does. But you can seldom coax Jack to be the poet, and Billy is so obliging that way.

July twentieth.

We all helped grandmother make her rose jar to-day. We picked quarts of rose leaves. The most fragrant ones grow on grandmother's wedding bush. When grandmother was married she had a bouquet of white roses and she stuck one of the green shoots from it down in the garden, never thinking it would really grow, but it did, and it is the biggest bush in the garden now. It does seem so funny to think that there ever was a time when grandfather and grandmother were not married. You would think to look at them that they always had been. What a dreadful thing it would have been if they had not got married to each other! I don't suppose there would have been a single one of us children here at all; or if we were we would be part somebody else, and that would be almost as bad. When I think how awful it would have been to have been born part somebody else, or not born at all, I cannot feel sufficiently thankful that grandfather and grandmother happened to marry each other, when there were so many other people in the world they might have married.

I am trying to love the zinnias best, because nobody seems to like them at all, and I am sure they must feel it; but all the time deep down in my heart I know I love the roses best. You just can't help loving the roses.

August nineteenth.

Grandmother let us have our tea in the garden this afternoon, and it was lovely. We spread the tablecloth on the grass by the well-house, and it was just like a picnic. Everything tasted twice as good, and we did not mind the ants at all.

I am going to call the southernwood "apple-ringie" after this. Jean says that is what they call it in Scotland, and I think it sounds ever so much more poetical than southernwood. Jack says the right name is "boy's love," but I think that is silly.

September fifth.

Billy says that a rich man in town has a floral clock in his garden. It looks just like the face of a clock, and there are flowers in it that open every hour, and you can always tell the time. Billy wishes we had one here

but I don't. What would be the good of it? Nobody ever wants to know the time in a garden.

It was my turn to be queen, and I wore the daisy crown all day. I like to be queen, but there is really not as much fun in it as in being a common person, after all. Besides, the rest all call you "Your Majesty," and curtesy whenever they come into your presence, if they don't forget, and it makes you feel a little lonely.

September twenty-seventh.

Shadows are such pretty things and the garden is always full of them. Sometimes they are so still you would think them asleep. Then again they are laughing and skipping. Outside, down on the shore fields, they are always chasing each other. They are wild shadows; the shadows in the garden are tame shadows.

October twentieth.

Everything seems to be rather tired of growing. The pine tree and the firs and the 'mums. The sunshine is thick and yellow and lazy, and the crickets sing all the time. The birds have nearly all gone.

The other day I thought I saw the ghost at last. I was coming through the fir grove and I saw somebody in blue sitting on the bench. How my heart beat! But it was only a visitor, after all. I don't know whether I was glad or disappointed. I don't think it would be a pleasant experience to see the ghost; but after you had seen it, think what a heroine you would be.

November tenth.

There was a little snow last night but it all melted as soon as the sun came out. Everything in the garden has gone to sleep and it is lonely and sad there now. I don't think I shall write any more in my garden book till spring.

Early morning was an exquisite time in the garden. Delicate dews glistened everywhere, and the shadows were black and long and clear-cut. Pale, peach-tinted mists hung over the bay, and little winds crisped across the fields and rustled in the poplar leaves in the wild corner. But the evening was more beautiful still, when the sunset sky was all aglow with delicate shadings and a young moon swung above the sea in the west. The robins whistled in the firs, and over the fields sometimes came lingering music from the boats in the bay. We used to sit on the old stone wall and watch the light fading out on the water and the stars coming out over the sea. And at

last grandmother would come down the honeysuckle path and tell us it was time that birds and buds and babies should be in bed. Then we would troop off to our nests in the house, and the fragrant gloom of a summer night would settle down over the Garden of Old Delights.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *A Garden of Old Delights* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]