

# The Gardens of Memory

(FROM "AUNT JANE, OF KENTUCKY.")

BY ELIZA CALVERT HALL.

Each of us had his own way of classifying humanity. To me, as a child, men and women fell naturally into two great divisions: those who had gardens and those who had only houses.

Brook walls and pavements hemmed me in and robbed me of my birthrights; and to the fancy of childhood a garden was a paradise, and the people who had gardens were happy Adams and Eves walking in a golden mist of sunshine and showers, with green leaves and blue sky overhead, and blossoms springing at their feet; while those others, who had no gardens, were the dark, shadowy, and unlovely people who were the people who had no gardens.

As I grew older I learned that there was a small subclass composed of people who not only possessed gardens, but whose gardens possessed them, and it is the spots sown and tended by these that blossom eternally in one's remembrance as veritable villas—"gardens of dreams."

In every one's mind there is a lonely space, almost abandoned of consciousness, the time between infancy and childhood. It is like that period when the earth was "without form, and void," and darkness was upon the face of the deep. Here, like lost stars floating in the firmament of mind, will be found two or three faint memories, remote and disconnected. With me one of these memories is of a garden. I was riding with my father along a pleasant country road. There were sunshine and a gentle wind, and white clouds in a blue sky. We stopped at a gate. My father opened it, and I walked up a grassy path to the ruins of a house. The chimney was still standing, but all the rest was a heap of blackened, half-burned rubbish which sprang and summer were covering with wild vines and weeds, and around the ruins of the house lay the ruins of the garden. The honeysuckle, bereft of its trellis, wandered helplessly over the ground, and amid a rank growth of weeds sprang a host of yellow snapdragons. I remember the feeling of rapture that was mine at the thought that I had found a garden where flowers could be gathered without asking permission of any one. And as long as I live, the sight of a yellow snapdragon on a sunny day will bring back my father from his grave and make me a little child again gathering flowers in that deserted garden, which is seemingly in another world than this.

A later memory than this is of a place that was scarcely more than a paved court lying between high brick walls. But because we children wanted a garden so much, we called it by that name; and here and there a little of Mother Earth's bosom, left uncovered, gave us some warrant for the misnomer. Yet the spot was not without its beauties, and a less exacting child might have found content within its boundaries.

Here was the Indian peach tree, whose pink blossoms told us that spring had come. Its fruit in the late summer was like the pomgranate in its rich color, "blood-tinged with a veined humanizing," and its friendly limbs held a swing in which we cleft the air like the birds. Yet even now the sight of an Indian peach brings melancholy thoughts. A yellow honeysuckle clambered over a wall. But this flower has no perfume, and a honeysuckle without perfume is a base pretender, to be cast out of the family of real sweet-scented honeysuckle. There were two roses of similar quality, one that detestable mockery known as the burr-rose. I have for this flower the feeling of repulsion that one has for certain disagreeable human beings—people with cold, clammy hands, for instance. It listed its feeble pink color, its rough calyx, and its odor always made me think of vast fields of snow, and feebly hanging from snow-covered roofs under leaden wintry skies. Unhappy mistake to call such a thing a rose, and plant it in a child's garden! The only place where it might fitly grow is by the side of the road that led Childie Roland to the dark tower; between the bit of "stuffed ground" and the marsh near to the "palsied oak," with its roots set in the "hog, clay, and rubble, sand and stark black death."

Spot after rose I recall with the same dislike, though it was pleasing to the eye. The bush was tall, and had the nature of a climber; it drooped in a lachrymated way, and had to be tied to a stout post. I think it could have stood upright had it chosen to do so, and its drooping seemed only an ugly habit, without grace. The cream-white flowers grew in clusters, and the buds were red when they were first opening. Only the body of the rose; the soil, the real self, is the rose odor, and no rose-odor was incarnated in its petals. Again and again, deceived by its beauty, I would stoop to kiss my face to breathe its fragrance, and always the faint, sickening-sweet odor brought me only disappointment and disgust. It was a Llama among roses. Another peculiarity was that it had very few thorns, and in the garden it was a vast bed of roses as its sweetness; and lacking the rose thorn and the rose perfume, what claim had it to the rose name? I never saw this false rose elsewhere than in the garden, and because it dishonored its royal family, I would not willingly meet it face to face again.

We children cultivated sweet-scented geraniums in pots, but a flower in a pot was to me like a bird in a cage. The fragrant geraniums gave me no more pleasure than did the scentless many-headed lady-slippers that we planted in tiny borders, and the purple flowering pansies and white blossoms of the madder vines that grew on a tall trellis by the cistern's grassy mound. There was nothing here to satisfy my longing, and I turned hungrily to other gardens whose gates were open to me in those early years. In the garden of my father's house, purple heartsease, flower of the beautiful name. Year after year had the blossomed and gone to seed till the harvest of flowers in their season was past gathering, and any child in the neighborhood was at liberty to pluck them by the handfuls, while the wicked ones played at "chicken fighting," and littered the ground with decapitated bodies. There is no heartsease nowadays, only the magenta many of which it was the modest forerunner. But one little cluster of dark, spicy blooms like those I used to gather in that old garden would be more to me than the most splendid pansy created by the florist's art.

The hills of the valley calls to mind a garden, almost in the heart of town, where this flower went forth to possess the land and spread itself in so reckless a growth that at intervals it had to be uprooted to protect the landed rights of the rest of the community. Never were there such beds of lilies! And when they pierced the black loam with their long, sheath-like leaves, and broke their

alabaster boxes of perfume on the feet of spring, the most careless passer-by, was forced to stay his steps for one ecstatic moment to look and to breathe, to forget and to remember. The shadow of the owner's house lay on this garden at the morning hour, and a tall brick building intercepted its share of the afternoon sunshine; but the love and care of the wrinkled old woman who tended it kept the place of red sunshine, and every thing planted here grew with a luxuriance not seen in any other garden. The mistress of the garden, when questioned as to this, would say it was because she gave her flowers to all who asked, and the God of gardens loved the cheerful giver and blessed her with an abundance of rain and blossom. The highest philosophy of human life she used in her management of this little plant world; for, burying the weeds at the roots of the flowers, the evil was made to minister to the good, and the good to minister to all their kind were transmuted by nature's fine chemistry into pills, lilies, and roses.

The purple splendor of the wistaria recalls the garden that I always entered with a fearful joy for the French gardener retained absolute, and the flowers might be looked at, but not plucked. How different from those wild gardens of the neighboring woods where we children named the perfect man on the hill, and shouting rapturously over the finding of a bed of countless blue violets or delicate anemones that withered and were thrown away when we reached home—an allegory, alas! of our later lives.

There was one garden that I coveted in those days as Naboth coveted his neighbor's vineyard. After many years, so many that my childish longing was almost forgotten, I had it, and I and my mother, together with my father, went to the bee-haunted hillside, and looked at the sunset through the scarlet and yellow leaves of the sugar maples, and I learned that "every desire is the prophecy of its own fulfillment," and if the fulfillment is delayed, it may be deeper when it does come.

All these were gardens of the South; but before childhood was over I watched the quick, luxuriant growth of flowers through the brief summer of a northern climate. The garden, like the old, sweet stream, ran up to him and found him waiting for it. The garden, like the old, sweet stream, ran up to him and found him waiting for it. The garden, like the old, sweet stream, ran up to him and found him waiting for it.

"I don't reckon Solomon was thinkin' about flowers," Aunt Jane said, when she was a time for all things. Aunt Jane was wont to say, "but anyhow it's so. You know the Bible says that the Lord God walked in the garden of Eden in the cool of the day; and that the best time for seein' flowers is when they're fresh from a good night's sleep and when she's cookin' a 12 o'clock dinner in a hot kitchen. You think them poppies are mighty pretty with the sun shinin' on 'em, but a poppy ain't a sun flower; it's a sunrise flower."

And so I found them when I saw them in the faint light of a summer dawn, delicate and tremulous, like lovely apparitions of the night that an hour of sun will dispel. With other flowers the miracle of blossoming is performed so slowly that we have no time to watch its every stage. There is no precise moment when the rose leaves become a bud, or when the bud turns to a full-blown flower. But, as dawn by a bed of poppies, you may watch the birth of a flower as it slips from the calyx, casting it to the ground as a soul casts aside its outgrown body, and smoothing the wrinkles from its face, and then, as the sun rises, the flower is a beauty, though the night of death be but a few hours away.

"And some evenin' when the moon's full and there's a dew fallin'," continued Aunt Jane, "that's the time to see roses, and to smell roses, too. And chrysanthemums, they're sun-down flowers. You come into my garden about the first of next November, child, some evenin' when the sun's gone down, and you'll see the sun's lookin' like stars, and the yellor ones shinin' like big gold lamps in the dusk; and when the last light of the sun strikes the red ones, they look like cups of wine, and some of 'em turn to colors that there ain't any names for. Chrysanthemums jest match the red and yellor leaves on the trees, and the colors you see in the sky after the first frosts when the cold weather begins to set in. Yes, honey, there's a time and

a season for everything; flowers, too, jest as Solomon said. An old garden is like an old life. Who plants from youth to age writes a record of the years in leaf and blossom, and the spot becomes as sacred as old wine, old books, and old friends. Here in the garden of Aunt Jane's planting I found that flowers were also memories; that memories were folded in the petals of roses and lilies; that a rose's perfume might be a voice from a vanished yesterday; and even the snake gliding across our path might prove a messenger bearing a story of other days. Aunt Jane made a pass at it with her hoe, and laughed as the little creature disappeared on the other side of the fence.

"I never see a striped snake," she said, "but I don't think of Sam Amos and the time he got snakes. It wasn't often we got a joke on Sam, but his 'n'tment and his snake kept us laughin' for many a day."

"Sam was one of them big, blunderin' men, always ravin' Milly trouble, and havin' trouble himself, jest through pure carelessness. He meant well, and Milly used to say that if what Sam did was even half as good as what Sam intended to do, there'd be no perfect man on God's earth. One of his careless ways was scatterin' his clothes all over the house. Milly'd scold and fuss about it, but Sam got worse instead of better up to the day he saw the snake, and after that Milly said there wasn't a more orderly man in the State. The way of it was this: Sam was raisin' an embankment 'round one of his ponds, and Uncle Jim Matthews and Amos Crawford was helpin' him. It was one Monday mornin', about the first of April, and the weather was warm and sunny, jest the kind to bring out snakes. I reckon there never was anybody lated a snake as much as Sam did. He'd been skeered by one when he was a child, and never got over it. He used to say there was jest two things he was afraid of—Milly and a snake. That mornin' Uncle Jim and Amos got to the pond before Sam did, and Uncle Jim holered out, 'Well, Sam, we beat you this time.' Uncle Jim never got tired tellin' what happened next. He said Sam ran up the embankment with his spade, and set it in the ground and his foot on it to push it down. The next minute he got a yell that you could 'a' heard half a mile, slung the spade over in the middle of the pond, jumped three feet in the air, and ran down the embankment yellin' and kickin' and throwin' his arms about in every direction, and at last he fell down on the ground a good distance from the pond.

"Amos and Uncle Jim was so taken by surprise at first that they jest stood still and looked. Amos says, 'You see, the man's gone crazy all at once.' Uncle Jim says, 'He's havin' a spell. His father and grandfather before him used to have them spells.' They ran up to him and found him shakin' like a leaf, the cold sweat streamin' out of every pore, and gaspin' and sayin', 'Take it away! Take it away!' and all the time he was throwin' out his left foot in every direction. Finally Uncle Jim grabbed hold of his foot and there was a red and black necktie stickin' out of the leg of his pants. He pulled it out and says he, 'Why, Sam, what's your Sunday necktie doin' up your pants leg?'

"They said Sam looked at it in a foolish sort of way, and then he fell back laughin' and cryin' at the same time, jest like a woman, and it was five minutes or more before they could stop him. Uncle Jim brought water and ran on his head, and Amos fanned him with his hat, and at last they got him in such a fix that he could sit up and talk, and says he, 'I took off my necktie last night and slung it down on a chair where my every-day pants was layin'. When I put my foot in my pants this mornin' I must 'a' carried the necktie inside, and by the time I got to the pond it'd worked down, and there was a black snake with red stripes.'

"He started to get up, but his ankle was sprained, and Uncle Jim says, 'No wonder, Sam, you jumped about six feet when you saw that snake crawlin' out of your pants leg.' 'And Sam says, 'Six feet? I know I jumped six hundred feet, Uncle Jim.' 'Well, they got him to the house and sold Milly about it, and she says, 'Well, Sam, I'm too sorry for you to laugh at you like Uncle Jim, but I must say this wouldn't 'a' happened if you'd folded up that necktie and put it away in the top drawer.' 'I was settin' on the side of the bed rubbin' my ankle, and he give a groan and says he, 'Things has come to a new pass in Kentucky when a sober, God-fearin' man like me has to put his necktie in the top drawer to keep from seein' snakes.'

"I declare to goodness!" laughed Aunt Jane, as she laid down her trowel and pushed back her collar. "If I never heard of this principle of plantin' her garden was continually extendin' its boundaries; and denizens of the garden proper were to be found in every nook and corner of her domain. In the spring you looked for grass only; and in the summer you looked for a few sunny weeks of the front yard would be a great flower garden. Then blossom and leaf would fade, and you might walk all summer over the velvet grass, never knowing how much of it was grass and how much of it was the darkness of the earth. But when I go back to Aunt Jane's garden, I pass through the front yard and the back yard between rows of lilies, syringas, calycanthus, and honeysuckle. I open the rickety gate and find myself in a genuine old-fashioned garden, the homely, inclusive spot that welcomed all growing things to its hospitable bosom. In the days when there were no impassable barriers of grass only, and I starting up at your feet, like the unexpected joys of life, came the golden daffodil, the pale narcissus, the purple iris, and the red and yellow tulip, flourishing as bravely as in the soil of its native Holland; and for a few sunny weeks the front yard would be a great flower garden. Then blossom and leaf would fade, and you might walk all summer over the velvet grass, never knowing how much of it was grass and how much of it was the darkness of the earth. But when I go back to Aunt Jane's garden, I pass through the front yard and the back yard between rows of lilies, syringas, calycanthus, and honeysuckle. I open the rickety gate and find myself in a genuine old-fashioned garden, the homely, inclusive spot that welcomed all growing things to its hospitable bosom. 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