

**EVERYTHING  
IN THE  
GARDEN**



**IS**



**NOSEY**

**PAUL GORDON BUSBY**

**EVERYTHING IN THE  
GARDEN IS  
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**by**

**Paul Gordon Busby**

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This is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

*This book is dedicated to  
Ashmi, Moitree and Rahul*

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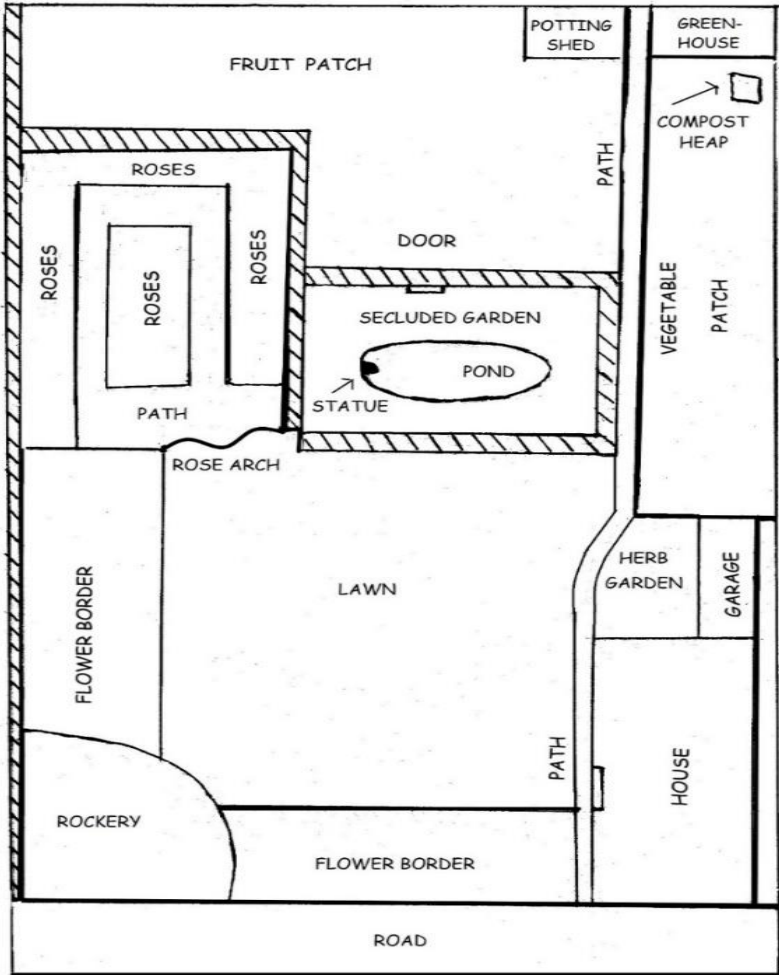
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## INTRODUCTION

It was not a large garden in comparison with those other gardens which surround stately homes and castles lived in by the British aristocracy, or people who have achieved fame, in one way or the other. But compared to the average garden around the average suburban house in Britain, it was in a different league.

It contained a spectacular rose garden, various flower borders and a rockery surrounding a fair-sized lawn (not too big, not too small in relation to the whole garden) with a few weeping willows standing sentry over it, a large area devoted to fruit bushes, plants and trees, a spacious vegetable patch, a herb garden, a secluded hide-away with its own pond, a greenhouse and of course, a potting shed, large enough to cater for the implements necessary to look after the garden, but ironically not big enough to store most of the pots, which had to be kept outside,

In the winter it was a rather forlorn place, with huge gaps of bare soil where unsuspecting annuals would later be planted and perennials which would choose to emerge in their own time. The grass, looking more like an overgrown meadow than a manicured lawn, felt sorry for itself, and many of the trees and bushes, still in hibernation, were devoid of all greenery. The garden in winter was not the sort of place you would want to spend much time in, and few people did so.

But once spring had come when fresh green leaves made their appearance together with a cheerful array of spring flowers, a welcome dash of colour returned to the garden. It was instantly transformed and from then until late autumn it became a place of beauty and, if you excuse another cliché, a haven of peace and tranquillity.

Or was it? Maybe visitors to the garden thought so. But what of the residents? And I don't mean the owners of the house or the gardeners. I am referring to the real residents who were there, twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week and in some cases, the whole year long and even longer.

This is their account of what it was like there. You may be surprised and even shocked by their revelations. But don't take my word for it. Let's listen to what they themselves have to say about it.

## THE ROSE GARDEN

It is no exaggeration to say that the rose garden was the centre of attraction to visitors, drawn there by the dizzying mixture of scents and dazzling colours of that much-loved flower.

It was very basic in design – a square-shaped enclave with walls on the left and right sides and at the rear, with climbing roses supported by trellises on these walls. In front of them were wide rose-beds which bordered a path. In the centre of the path was another elongated rose-bed. In recent times, the central path around this bed had been made one-way circuit to avoid visitors bumping into one another and blocking the way to others. The entrance/exit was under an arch, covered by a very showy rose to draw in people from the lawn in front of it.

The simplicity of this design benefitted not only the visitors and the gardeners, but also enabled the different roses to be aware of what was going on all around them and to communicate with each other.

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“Have you been awake for long?” Roseanne asked Flora, her neighbour.

“No. I’ve only just come to. Wish it was a bit warmer. I’d have slept in if I knew it was going to be this chilly. What about you?”

“I’ve been awake for some time. Maybe a week or so. We’ve got a new arrival. They’ve taken away poor Mildred. Mildred’s mildew finally got the better of her and she’s been replaced by Simone. She’s a singleton - only has five petals, I’m told. Only young, but she’s been around a bit. Started in the rockery and then in the flower garden for a while before coming here. Can’t seem to settle.”

“Perhaps she’s been put here because she been upsetting her old neighbours. Sounds like she could be trouble.”

“Got rather a posh name, though – Simone. Whereabout is she?”

“Over there, climbing up the trellis on the far wall.”

“Hmm! Looks pretty ordinary to me. Nothing to get too excited about. Not that I get excited about other roses, mind you. I’m not obsessed with petals, but I do feel that not having many on is rather vulgar. She’s definitely not like us.”

“You mean with our double-petals and all?”

“Well, double-petals do show we’ve got good breeding. Singletons, like her, are not far removed from wild dog roses. She’s more than likely a social climber. All the climbers I’ve known have pretentious names.”

“I think you may be right, there.”

“Just look at her. She’s mostly white with pink around the edges. The splitting image of one of those dog-roses that you find in the hedges. Common as muck if you ask me.”



“Talking of muck, I notice they’ve covered my nether regions with horse manure. Doesn’t half pong. They say we thrive on it. They don’t seem to realise we put a spurt on to grow up higher so we can’t smell it so much.”

“That’s may be true for you, Flora, but I can’t do that. I’m not as tall as you are. All I can do, as ground cover, is to spread out sideways, so I can never get away from the stinking manure.”

“Well, maybe you should grow over the path. They’d never put manure on the path in case visitors tread in it and then they’d kick up a stink.”

“Quite literally, Flora.”

“Well, I must get on. I’ve got some buddies coming today so I must prepare myself for when they arrive. Bye for now.”

“Bye.”

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By a month later, Roseanne had managed to creep closer to her friend Mary. Mary had hated that name. There was always confusion between Mary rose and rosemary and when the children from the house had been instructed to fetch some cuttings of rosemary for a recipe the chef was making, they would sometimes end up in the rose garden and molest poor Mary. She never knew whether the chef had a good look before adding snipped-up bits of her stalk into the food. No-one was carried off by an ambulance, so she presumed he had noticed the mistake in time.

“You’re looking well, Mary,” said Roseanne to her. “Have you had any snips lately?”

“No, fortunately,” she replied. “Either the children are no longer trusted to help collect the herbs, or they’ve got a new chef up there who doesn’t like using rosemary. Anyway, good to talk to you. I’m just about to make myself a hybrid tea. Would you fancy one?”

“I’ll only have water, thanks, which reminds me – they’re a bit late bringing the watering can around today.”

“That’s because it’s been quite rainy of late and they probably think we don’t need any more water. Have you tried looking droopy? That sometimes helps.”

“Not much good for me. I’m so low down I can’t droop much and they wouldn’t notice if I did.”

“Ha, you should see her over there. She’s a damask, and not from this area at all. Her family originally came here from the Middle East. She puts on an act of wilting whenever she gets even a little bit thirsty and they immediately fetch the watering can for her. Whenever I’m flaked out, all I get is a dribble at the most, but she gets a whole can-full.”

“I reckon it’s her scent. People all go crazy about roses which have a strong smell. With me, they can be quite sniffy, but then blow their noses as they think they’ve caught a cold. With roses like the damask they walk away smiling. By the way, what’s her name?”

“Diva.”

“That doesn’t surprise me in the slightest. I expect she sings and dances too.”

“Not sure about that. We’ll have to wait until the summer to find out.”

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The summer soon came, although you wouldn’t have guessed it at first. Rain and cold winds kept the visitors away until the sun deigned to come out and a spell of hot weather ensued, bringing with it coachloads of day-trippers and cars full of garden enthusiasts eager to mooch around and enjoy themselves in the wonderful surroundings.

The rambling rose adorning the arch at the entrance had the usual effect and people soon made their entrance and slowly ambled around the path, pointing at various roses and admiring the colourful display they made.

“Here they all come. Hope they don’t tread on my lowest stalks like they did last year,” said one rose.

“What a way to earn a living,” another said. “I could be in a cemetery and no-one would even notice me, and I could just get on with life.”

“How many more hours have we got of this?” the first rose asked.

“Until closing time. Grit your ovaries and think of England. It’ll soon be over.”

People oohed and aahed and exclaimed: “Isn’t that lovely!” and “Look at this one – isn’t it beautiful.” Some of the roses seemed to enjoy the attention they were getting, but others were getting more and more annoyed.

“I can’t stand all this being stared at,” one said. “It makes me feel like a spectacle object. I’m not just a pretty thing. I have a personality too.”

“I know what you mean,” said another. “Summer’s bad enough, but come the autumn they just want to see my hips. Some people even feel them. Disgusting! There should be a sign – No hands on hips here.”

A young couple entered the rose garden. They stopped at the bright red damask rose.

“Just smell this one,” the man said. “Isn’t that simply divine.”

The woman leaned over and had a good smell of it. It had a strong, almost intoxicating sweet scent. Her immediate reaction was to agree with her boyfriend. Then she thought about it. She had recently spent a lot of money on toiletries to add to her own allure. Her boyfriend had not commented on how nicely she smelled, but here he was, gushing about this red rose. She felt really put out.

“I suppose it’s O.K. - if you like that sort of thing,” she commented. “But it’s a bit over-powering for my liking.”

Roseanne was watching this and couldn’t help but smile when she overheard this.

The couple continued on their way along the path and stopped in front of Simone, the five-petalled rose which was decorating the rear wall.

“Oh, I do love this sort of rose,” the young woman exclaimed. “It reminds me of when I was girl and used to walk along the country lanes where the wild roses bloomed. It made me so happy.”

Her boyfriend nodded, although he did not think the rose was anything special. But he had to admit that he found the scent very pleasant.

“It smells very nice,” he said.

This puzzled his girlfriend who could not smell it at all. I wonder if I’m losing my sense of smell, she thought. Then it struck her that he must have noticed the scent she was wearing for the first time. She smiled but did not say anything.

Roseanne, who had noticed this, was furious. How could people be so stupid to fall for such an unremarkable rose which clearly had very little breeding. It was unbelievable. She, herself, had only small flowers but at least they had a double row of petals. Being of low height, though, was a problem for her. People noticed she was there but never stopped to admire her as they did with the other taller and more flamboyant roses. Her anger quickly turned to sadness and self-pity.

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The hours passed very slowly. Shortly before closing time a mother and her little girl came into the rose garden. While the woman was spending a long time looking at all the floribunda and hybrid tea roses her daughter was getting bored. She could not appreciate the roses her mother liked so much as they were much too high for her to see or smell.

She looked down at the ground and became absorbed in watching a beetle scurrying on its way; then a line of ants marched along in procession; and then a beautiful butterfly alighted on a leaf. When it flew off, the girl had a good look at the leaf and the flower beside it. They belonged to Roseanne.

“Which rose did you like best?” the mother asked her child.

“This one,” she said. “All the insects like it too. Look!”

A ladybird landed on one of the leaves and the little girl picked it up in her hand. It stayed still for a moment before going back to the leaf. A big bumble bee flew into one of the flowers and then into several more of them until it had collected enough pollen on its back leg to be getting on with. The girl was intrigued.

“If we had a rose, I would want one of these,” she told her mother.

“Well maybe we need to get one,” said her mother. And they left.

Roseanne was thrilled to bits. She no longer envied the other rose bushes. She was famous.

“Maybe Simone isn’t so common after all,” she said to herself. “And maybe there is nothing wrong with the highly-scents-ative Diva. They may attract some people. Fine. But I am popular with little girls and their mothers and all manner of insects. I can now hold my head up high for the first time...even if it is only three foot from the ground.”

## THE LAWN

Visitors to the rose garden were noted with some annoyance by Lorne. (He had changed his name by deed poll to make himself sound more refined. In a garden like this, you had to keep up to the standards expected of you.) People had to cross him to get to see the roses, and he certainly could get very cross. He hated stiletto heels which dug holes in him. He hated children running up and down on him, particularly when they churned up the grass: it took ages for it to settle down again. And most of all he hated dogs who left "calling cards" when their owners weren't looking, and then dug the ground with their paws to try and bury what they had deposited. In short, he hated everything and everyone.

He felt that visitors had come to the large garden to admire him, first and foremost. It is true that people did love the look of the lawn. Years ago, when he was growing up, he did not care so much about his appearance. The owners of the house kept a flock of sheep to keep the grass trim. That was alright with him at the time. After that, the owners got rid of the sheep and the gardeners used scythes and shears to keep him looking spruce. That could be painful for him when the implements lost their sharpness, and he occasionally got nicked when an inexperienced gardener was at work.

The heavy lawn-mowers which came next were a bit more acceptable, apart from the heavy rollers which stifled him. He was glad when these were replaced with light-weight lawn-mowers, apart from the noise and the dreadful smell of petrol (gasoline) which they left behind.

"I don't want to be known as a Lorne-moaner," he used to say to the willow tree which shared part of the garden with him. "However, grooming is very important to me. And it has to be done at least twice a week. I just wish that people treated me with more love and respect."

The willow tree, who was besotted with another willow tree some distance away, was swaying to and fro in the breeze and was unable, and more importantly, unwilling to hear him.

Apart from the mowing, Lorne had to put up with being raked, especially in the autumn when leaves from the trees and bushes landed up on him.

"It plays havoc with my stripes," he said to a petunia in the flower bed. The petunia was not interested. She'd heard it all before.

When he was having his winter nap, the gardeners used an aerator on him to help with his breathing. In old age he had developed severe grassthma and this helped, but at this time of year he was totally unaware of being treated for it. He often complained of being down-trodden, which indeed he was during the summer months, and this might have caused the affliction that came on later in the season.

The other thing the gardeners did for him in the winter was to apply some fertiliser and sand. Where the grass was getting bare - and he knew he had some bald spots - some grass seed was sprinkled over it. The new shoots soon grew and blended in with the old growth without any problems or resentment to the newcomers.

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Last year, he was beset with a number of problems. He had never known such a bad year for weeds. There was a proliferation of daisies, buttercups and clover. At least, these did not show once he had been mown, yet they destroyed his clean-cut appearance which he prided himself upon.

“It’s a bit like having acne,” he commented to the willow.

The willow was too busy weeping to even hear him.

“Oh, for goodness sake, stop blabbing,” Lorne said. “You’ve not got my problems.”

The willow continued to weep.

“Look, I’m sorry if I upset you. I wish I could do something about having weeds all the time,” Lorne said.

“Maybe it’s your age,” said the willow in between sobs.

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His troubles were exacerbated when bigger weeds came along – dandelions and thistles.

“Please, please do something about the dandelions,” he cried out to the gardeners, “before they go to seed and then the little perishers will get everywhere.”

For once the gardeners appeared to be listening. The next day they sprayed the entire lawn with a herbicide which made Lorne itch. Within days, the weeds had disappeared, but some of the grass turned brown in the spell of hot weather that had lasted for many weeks.

Lorne was beside himself with grief. He spoke to the rambling rose in the entrance to the rose garden who sympathised with him. She too had sometimes been given a spraying, once against white fly, and another time when she had black spots on her leaves.

“It’s not very nice, I agree. But given a bit of time, you’ll recover,” she told him kindly, although she couldn’t care less about his predicament.

Fortunately, the following few days saw a change in the weather and it rained every day, quite hard at times. An inexperienced part-time gardener, seeing the brown patches, applied some fertiliser to those areas, but used too much of it. Very soon some new green blades of grass appeared. But there was now too much old and new growth in the soil to be broken down and Lorne caught a nasty dose of thatch. This prevented nutrients and water from getting to the roots of the grass. It was soon remedied by raking it out. But it didn’t look pretty for a while and it hurt Lorne’s self-esteem.

“I used to have worms,” Lorne told the gardener, “but they’ve deserted me and went off to the flower bed, just when I need them most.”

Indeed, the worms had mainly left the lawn and joined the flowers where they felt they were more appreciated.

“No use boasting about having worms when all you do is to complain about us the whole time,” commented one of them who overheard the conversation from a patch of new dahlias she was helping to get established.

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If this wasn't enough, a new menace then appeared: moles. The immaculate flat surface of the lawn was now interrupted in places by mole-hills.

"Go away!" shouted Lorne.

"Why should I?" Marvin the mole answered him, cheekily.

"Because you are ruining my good looks," said Lorne.

"I'm entitled to be here too."

"No, you're not. Go home!"

"This is my home. I am a mole and I live in a..."

"Stop it. I know where. But you can find another hole to live in somewhere else."

"But it's August. We've all come here on our summer holey-days."

"That's too bad. Find another place to go."

"If that's your attitude, we'll see who gets to stay here – you or us."

With that, the mole disappeared down the nearest hole.

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During the next few days more and more mole-hills appeared. The underground resistance was beginning to take shape. Lorne was furious about it and spent most of his time cursing the moles. Yet the more he ranted and raved, the more mole-hills sprung up.

Archie the arachnid wandered over to him one day.

"You're looking a bit worse for wear," he commented. "You need to get in shape. You're letting the side down."

"I can't help it. It's these confounded moles I've got," said Lorne.

"There are many different ways of getting rid of moles. I've seen lots about it on the web."

"What would you suggest?"

"You could coat yourself with garlic juice every evening and wash it off in the morning."

"The smell of that would put off anyone coming near me."

"Well, how about covering yourself with onion skin and the moles will disappear in due course."

"Can't do that. I had a terrible argument with the onions a few weeks ago when their maggots paid me a visit. I tried to tell them to keep their maggots, but they wouldn't listen and mobbed up on me. Very clannish they are, the young onion sects."

“The only other thing I can suggest is bathing in apple cider vinegar or pineapple juice.”

“I’d prefer plain cider, but I’ll give it a go.”

Lorne wondered how on earth he was going to get hold of either of the ingredients that the spider mentioned. But his dilemma was solved for him when the owners of the house had a special event on their lawn to raise funds for the local church. There were tables set up providing refreshments, which included pineapple juice, lemon juice, and apple juice - or so it was labelled. When the fresh apple juice ran out, some older cartons of it were retrieved from the garden shed, long past their sell-by date. These proved to have fermented into cider and some had gone quite vinegary. Many people did not like the taste, but as it was a fund-raising do, they did not object. When no-one else was watching, they poured most of the contents of their glasses on to the ground.

Lorne hated having this to drink but had no choice but to tolerate it. It was too much for the moles too. They had had enough of Lorne’s bickering at them, and the addition of the smell and taste of cider apple vinegar was anathema to them. They departed en masse and Lorne was finally left alone, although he did have a hangover for days afterwards.

The willow trees, however, simply loved the liquid refreshment, so much that they stopped weeping for a while. Or it could have been that they were all so blotto that they no longer heard Lorne’s constant complaining?

Lorne enjoyed a few days of peace and relaxation. But then the leaves started to fall on him and he had to endure being raked at frequent intervals.

My elder cousin, Lorna Doom, was quite right when she told me about how badly life was treating her in the garden in Somerset, he thought; I know just what she means.

His ill-tempered demeanour was well-known to the other inhabitants of the garden. Behind his back they referred to him by the nickname they had been given him: Lorne the Gloom.

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Be careful, then, the next time that you visit a garden and stand on the lawn. It might be Lorne. And be sure to ‘Keep off the grass’ when it says so. You may well regret it if you don’t do as it says. He is a firm believer in Lorne order.

## THE FLOWER BORDERS AND THE ROCKERY

Around the lawn on two sides were flower borders. Where they met a small hillock had been transformed into a rockery. There was intense rivalry between the two parts of the flower border, with the rockery acting as a go-between and sometimes supporting one side or the other.

The antagonism between the flower borders was created by the two gardeners who could not agree on what plants to grow, and where to place them. The plants in question took it upon themselves to take on the attitudes of their respective gardeners, but with much greater ferocity since they had to put up with the decisions made by them. But the plants did not necessarily agree with all of these decisions, it should be pointed out, and sometimes rebelled against them.

The one gardener was named Godfrey, which he delighted in telling people meant ‘the peace of God’. For short, he liked to be known as God and acted as if he was infallible and all-knowing. No-one else called him God, especially the other gardener.

She was called Gloria. At one time she was engaged to him until she realised that the marriage of Gloria to God would sound as if she had to be submissive to him, and she called off the wedding.

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They had constant arguments over the flower borders and settled upon the plan of him taking care of the one on the left side, and her, the one on the right side, while the rockery had to be a joint venture. Not long previous to this, the area was all lawn until the owners thought they would like to make it more colourful. The gardeners therefore had a free hand to create the new flower beds as they saw fit.

Although they agreed on the size and general shape of the borders and the rockery, this is where their agreement ended. Godfrey was the more conservative of the two and wanted traditional plants, whereas Gloria liked innovation and modern hybrids.

Whereas in his border to the left of the rockery Godfrey planted forget-me-nots, cowslips, marigolds and primroses beside the lawn, Gloria went in for large-flowered, colourful primulas and pansies, together with new varieties of tulips with vivid colours in her border.

When it came to cyclamens, begonias, snowdrops, and crocuses, both of them wanted them on their own side, but they could not agree on that happening, so a compromise was reached in that they should all be put in the rockery instead. However, both of them sneaked a few into their own beds when the other of them wasn't looking.

Behind the front row, as it were, taller plants were placed. Godfrey chose traditional yellow daffodils; Gloria preferred narcissi with different shades of yellow or white outer petals and a yellow trumpet.

It was then a question of each gardener selecting different flowers from one another. Godfrey had irises, Gloria, lilies; Godfrey wanted petunias, Gloria, nicotianias; Godfrey chose snap-dragons, Gloria, chrysanthemums; Godfrey had to have dahlias, so Gloria had to have gladioli. Michaelmas daisies, poppies and sweet williams were an obvious choice for Godfrey; just as delphiniums,



carnations and dianthus (pinks) were more to Gloria's liking. Anything which had an English name was more to Godfrey's taste; plants with purely long-winded Latin names appealed more to Gloria.

At the back of these plants were taller flowers. In Godfrey's section there were foxgloves and sunflowers; in Gloria's were hollyhocks and sweet peas, although they had to have some bamboos for support, which Godfrey thought lowered the tone of the place.

That left various larger shrubs which were placed in the rear in front of the walls at the back. Lilac and honeysuckle were favourites of Godfrey. For Gloria, buddleia and forsythia were more up her street.

One shrub they both wanted: clematis. After a lot of tussles between them, they settled on both having a clematis, as long as they were different varieties with completely different colours.

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The arguments which raged over the flower borders were nothing compared to those concerning the rockery. So many plants had been assigned to go here that it had to be enlarged to fit them all in, and that was before they had even started to grow and spread out. It is difficult enough for one person to decide the exact location of a single plant. But for two people and an assortment of different plants, it was a huge conundrum and became a source of much-heated arguments. The rocks, stones and pebbles, which were to make up the structure of the rockery, were sometimes used to reinforce the views of one side or another, but none were actually used in open warfare.

Gloria was dead-set on having a lot of edelweiss, having seen *The Sound of Music* too many times for her own good. Godfrey insisted upon plenty of violas, as he used to be a musician. They both agreed, however, on sedums – the ice plant, as they both felt that way towards each other.

She identified strongly with the female names of certain plants – veronica, daphne, erica (heather), whereas all he could come up with were gent-ians – lots of them.

Aubretias, saxifrages, geraniums and other plants were added to the rockery where any gaps appeared, usually when one or other of the gardeners was not present, even if it meant digging up one of the opponents' plants and substituting another for it.

Having filled out all the allotted space, it was then remembered they had forgotten all about the other plants which had earlier been allocated to go into the rockery. The only way they could find room for them was by removing some of the stones, which were surreptitiously placed in the other person's border. This caused further friction between the two gardeners.

I wish I had gone into the retail business, Gloria thought to herself. Much less conflict there. Godfrey had similar misgivings about his career. He wished he had joined the army. A much more peaceful existence than what he had here.

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Finally, the flower borders and rockery were all completed, a day before the opening season when the visitors to the garden would arrive.

That evening, there was an extraordinary meeting of the rockery committee.

“Lilies and gentians,” the head campanula announced, addressing the assembled rockery plants. (The lilies in question were lilies of the valley. Although only the two species were mentioned, everyone knew he was addressing them all.) “It has come to my notice that there are some things here which should by rights be elsewhere. I am referring to the cyclamen, begonias, snowdrops and crocuses which should all be rightfully placed in one of the flower borders. It’s way past bed time for them.”

“They are certainly not Alpine plants,” said an Alpine anemone from the far-right side of the rockery. “They should be deported.”

“I think we shall have to call upon the services of the birds from the immigration service to remove them,” the campanula said. “All those in favour, put up your petals.”

The vote was passed with no dissenters and very early the following morning a number of sparrows appeared. They picked up the offending plants in their beaks and carried them off to the flower borders on both sides where they dropped them onto the ground. The other plants in each of the borders complained loudly about this and a large-scale riot nearly took place.

“We don’t want cyclamens over here,” said a tulip. “They must go over to the other side.”

On the other side, a petunia was outraged: “What is this begonia doing here?” it cried out. “Go over there!”

There were also calls for the newly-arrived snowdrops to swap places with the crocuses. But the sparrows had done their duty and had flown off. Like it or not, the immigrants had to remain where they had been dropped. Appeals were made to the inhabitants of the rockery, but they were turned down flat.

The fury that this had provoked made some plants question whether they really wanted to have certain other plants as their next-door neighbours. The primulas in Gloria’s patch wanted to cross over to be near their relatives, the primroses on Godfrey’s side. Similarly, Gloria’s narcissi demanded to be able to join their relatives, Godfrey’s daffodils. The carnations in Gloria’s bed wanted to be nearer English-sounding plants as they didn’t speak Latin, which meant crossing over. No-one in Godfrey’s part wanted the fox-gloves anywhere near them and they said they should join the nicotianas in Gloria’s border as they had a lot in common: drugs of one sort or the other.

The plants in the rockery looked upon this with great amusement but refused to co-operate – they were unable to do so anyway.

The plants in the borders therefore made an appeal to the moles who agreed to dig some tunnels for those wishing to move, in order to escape without having to cross over into the rockery. In collaboration with them, a collection of shrews and voles succeeded in transporting the plants over to the other side. The whole operation took a long time but was completed by the time the first visitors began appearing the next morning.

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After all the hard work the gardeners had put into completing the planting of the flower borders and the rockery, the owners of the house gave them a much-needed few days off when the gardens

were opened to the public. They agreed to a truce to their fighting and thought that their planning and planting was now over and they could rest on their laurels.

When they came back to work and had a look at the flower borders they were taken aback. They no longer resembled anything they had worked so hard to put together. Godfrey accused Gloria of going behind his back and altering things, and Gloria accused Godfrey of doing the same thing.

Of course, the visitors were unaware of any of this but were full of praise for the way everything seemed to fit together so nicely. The owners of the house were very pleased with it too. Meanwhile, the plants had by now settled in well and were thriving, much to the annoyance of Godfrey and Gloria. Their job now was to make sure the borders and rockery were well-watered and they were kept clear of weeds.

It is a bit of a mystery how some, well a lot of the weeds that were cleared from one border somehow managed to find themselves in the other border when either of the gardeners took a break. It may have been pure coincidence or something else. Only the plants knew and they were keeping tight-lipped about it all. They had had a moving experience recently and were still getting over it.

## THE SECLUDED GARDEN

Between the rose garden and the wide path at the top of the lawn was a high wall against which a massive long-established blue-cum-violet wisteria held sway. No-one ever thought to query the purpose of the wall while they were admiring the blooms of the wisteria.

An adjoining wall followed the line of the path away from the lawn for some distance before another wall went off at right angles to join up with the wall at the far side of the rose garden, thus making another square enclosure. This was a private area and access to it was via an oak door around the back which was usually kept locked.

Here lay the secluded garden: a private place for the owner's family and their friends when they wished to escape from the noisy hordes of visitors, without being on view themselves.

The walls provided some much-needed sound-proofing as well as supports and protection for various tall shrubs – a brilliant red camellia, a purple rhododendron, planted in a huge decorated clay pot and everyone's favourite – a white xanthoceras sorbifolium which was chosen mainly for its name, as guests were challenged to pronounce it right after having had a few drinks. Pride of place, though, was an ancient fig tree which produced umpteen figs each year – too many to know what to do with them all.

In front of the walls were paving stones on which there were several stone benches (cushions were usually brought from the house to make them more comfortable to sit in or lie on). From the benches three steps led down to a pond, containing water lilies and other aquatic plants, some goldfish and the occasional frog.

Towering over the pond at the far end was the statue of a naked Greek god, happily relieving himself into the water. This always drew some amusement from the guests, but it also served to prevent any of them from wanting to paddle in the pond, although they did realise that it was just water that was entering the pond and not anything else!

What people did not see was that the water level stayed constant as the statue was attached to a pump which filtered and recycled the water. As the summer and autumn progressed, the water became dirtier and dirtier and at some point in winter, the pond had to be completely emptied and cleaned and the pumping mechanism had to undergo maintenance to keep working efficiently over the next tourist season.

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The secluded garden was a favourite spot to take family friends and relatives. It was not until October that a female cousin, together with her nine-year old son, were able to visit. The country was enjoying a beautiful Indian summer and it was thought that it would be very pleasant to have lunch in this garden soon after they had arrived.

A number of cushions and hampers of food and a number of bottles of wine and some fruit juices were taken from the house and placed on one of the benches in readiness for their arrival

The young lad entered the garden first, along with the lady of the house. While she was unpacking the hamper, he explored the hidden garden. He was absolutely mesmerised by the statue and what it was doing.

The man of the house came a few minutes later with the boy's mother. To prevent them all from being disturbed by inquisitive day-trippers who might discover the entrance, the owner locked the oak door from the inside and put the key in his shirt pocket. He then set about arranging the cushions around and pouring out drinks, while the lady gave a hand to his wife in unpacking the lunch.

No-one paid any attention to the boy who had wandered over to the statue, taken off his clothes and was copying the exact stance of the Greek statue.

"Look mum," he shouted as he tried to match the height and volume of the fountain emanating from the statue.

"Stop that at once," cried out his mother. "That is not nice."

"But the statue is doing it..."

"What Zeus wants to do is up to him. But you should behave yourself. That's very naughty. Now get dressed immediately!"

He did as he was told, although he could not understand why there was one rule for the Greeks and one for him. He had thought he had been very clever.

"I hope Zeus has not been helping himself to my wine," muttered the man of the house to his wife. His cousin overheard him and gave him a disapproving look.

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They all settled down into eating their lunch and as it was such a warm day, the adults then lay back on the benches and went to sleep. Meanwhile, the young boy thought he would make himself useful by collecting up the leaves which had fallen from the bushes and disposing of them in the pond where no-one would trip up over them.

The man had a sudden urge to go to the toilet himself. Seeing that both the women were dozing away happily, he walked over to the pond and relieved himself in it, not in such a dignified, unabandoned way that the Greek statue was doing it, but more furtively, being careful not to create too much noise in the process.

This did not escape the attention of the boy.

"Look mummy," he shouted.

Without opening her eyes his mother shouted back: "Don't do that! You are extremely naughty! Come here and I'll give you a slapped bottom!"

She opened her eyes to see the man in full flow, unable to stop himself.

"Oh, I'm terribly sorry," she apologised. "I thought it was my son."

He adjusted his dress, as the phrase goes, and sheepishly returned to his bench where he pretended to sleep so that he would not be scolded again. His wife, who had woken up with all the kerfuffle going on, looked disapprovingly at him and got up and went over to the boy.

"Let's count the figs," she said to him to give him something to do

The boy had no idea why the figs had to be counted but he did as he was told, and consumed a few while he was about it.

“You could do with a fig-leaf on that statue of yours,” said the cousin to the man. “It might help him control himself better.”

The man said nothing. He remembered that she had always been straight-laced and regretted inviting her to visit.

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The leaves that had been thrown into the pond were now having an effect upon the water circulation of the pump. The pipe leading up the statue became blocked and no water managed to go up it. It was as if the statue had overheard what the cousin had said, except that the fig-leaf was not where she had intentioned.

For a few minutes the statue ceased what it was doing and then something must have cleared the blockage in the water, most likely a frog looking for something to eat. Suddenly, the water shot out of the statues' anatomy in a straight line, landing on the man's T-shirt and drenching him. He took off his shirt and threw it over an unused bench. The key to the entrance door flew out and landed in the pond.

The boy's mother ran over to the pond to try and retrieve it and was herself doused by another stream of water. The statue was now totally out of control. The constant blocking up and sudden releasing of the pipe was causing the statue to stop for a few moments and then throw out jets of water in any direction.

The next person to get the full force of it was the man's wife. She screamed and tried to hide behind one of the bushes.

The noise had raised the curiosity of visitors outside. Some of them managed to scale the walls and watch what was happening. It was like a play taking place and they enjoyed the drama and laughed and clapped as each person got a soaking.

“We have got to get out of here quick,” shouted the wife. She was now in great need of the toilet herself, as was the boy's mother.

“But we're locked in and the key is in the pond,” the man said.

“I'll get it,” said the boy.

The others had visions of him jumping into the filthy water.

“No, don't do that,” his mother said quickly.

But he had other ideas. He picked a large fig-leaf off the tree and using his shoelace managed to tie it around the statue's anatomy so that the water was directed away from where his family were.

Bit by bit the water level went down until eventually it reached the bottom and the key became visible. The boy broke a branch off one of the shrubs and then used it to retrieve the key which he handed to the man. There was a loud cheer from the onlookers.

Minutes later they all made an undignified exit from the secret garden back to the house. The people who had witnessed the spectacle surrounded them and clapped wildly as they made their hurried way back to the house.

“Best play I have seen all year,” commented one man as they went by.

“Loved the performance,” said another. “So realistic.”

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It took the gardeners a long time to clean up the mess. It was not a pleasant job.

“Worst mess I’ve ever seen. You’d think they knew better,” said Gloria.

“But they own the place. And they pay us our wages. So better not to say anything,” said Godfrey.

For once they were in full agreement with one another.

The secluded garden was not used much after that. And the door was never locked. To prevent any tourists from using the pond as a public convenience, some toilets were installed on the premises.

Oh, and in case you were wondering, the woman and her son were never invited back. But they never wanted to come back anyway. It has put them off ponds for life. As for Greek statues, the lady makes a point of always carrying a fig-leaf with her when she visits gardens and museums and will not hesitate to use it if she sees one that is naked. You just can’t be too sure, she maintains. The same thing could happen again. Anywhere. And at any time.

## THE FRUIT PATCH

The fruit and the vegetables were grown in two separate areas, of which the former was much larger, as it had to accommodate several fruit trees and different fruit bushes.

The king and queen of the fruit section were undoubtedly the apple trees: the Granny Smiths eating apple and the Bramley cooker. Granny Smith felt that at her age, her days of being pollinated should be over. But Bramley felt he still needed her. He was also much older than her and she respected him. His ancestors came from Nottinghamshire. Her family had moved here from Australia and she was afraid of losing her right to remain here if she kicked up a fuss.

Both apples were kindly monarchs who ruled over their domain in a fair and fruity fashion. It helped that they both kept very healthy.

“An apple a day keeps the doctor away,” Granny Smith was wont to say, “and we have never had to have the doctor visit us.”

The pear tree, Pyrus, told her that if you included all the apples produced by both apple trees, and they were stored in the right way, they would still not be available for the entire year, even if only one was consumed every day. Besides, they may not have had the doctor out to see them, but they had to be sprayed a few times every year against diseases.

“That is indeed true,” said Bramley. “But may I remind you that that is no way to talk to a lady, especially an elderly lady, even if she is Australian.”

This really riled Granny Smith who called him a useless wombat and threatened to attack his bark with a herd of wild kangaroos...if she could find any in the area.

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Beneath the pear tree in terms of height (and rank, as Pyrus believed) came the raspberry canes which spread wildly. They would have taken over the entire garden if left unchecked. However, they were very easy-going and did not put up any resistance to being restrained. Once the gardener's back was turned, though, they would carry on propagating themselves all over the garden.

The same could also be said of the blackberries which wanted to spread far from the trellises that were provided for them. But anyone trying to keep them in their place came away with thorns in their fingers. If any plant could be accused of being thoroughly bad-tempered, it was the blackberries. They resisted being domesticated and thought of themselves as being upper-class brambles and needed to be treated cordially, if not with great reverence.

Further down were the gooseberry bushes, many more than was required for the amount of fruit they bore. The reason for this was that the owner's wife desperately wanted a child, but could not have one herself, so she kept planting new gooseberry bushes to see if there was a new-born baby underneath any of them. She never found one, it should be added, although she did come across a discarded chocolate box once, as well as an empty wine bottle and bunches of flowers on other occasions. They're not trying hard enough, she concluded.



There were also black and red currant bushes. They produced a proliferation of currants which required a lot of time to pick, something which the gardeners were reluctant to do in the height of summer when there was so much else to do. Instead of all ripening at the same time, the individual currants took it in turns, vying with each other to be the last to be ready to be picked. In essence, they were attention-seekers.

Lower down still were the rhubarb plants, their enormous leaves creating ideal habitats for all manner of insects, slugs and snails which went out from there each night to feast upon other fruit. For this reason, they were not at all popular members of the fruit community.

At the bottom of the hierarchy were the strawberries, much loved by those who came across them, including the slugs who lived under the rhubarb leaves. The other fruit, however, with the exception of the raspberries, hated the strawberries. It's not right that they should be so sweet-natured, they complained. We all need a lot of sugar when eaten, but they don't. If we had that much sugar in us, we would be diabetic.

The strawberries were well aware of the ill-feeling towards them and one day decided to do a runner. On thinking it over, they thought it better to stay put and just reduce the size of their berries to make them less noticeable. They were getting on in age too and required more and more care. Few people came to see them now and they led a lonely existence, ignored by people and shunned by the other fruit.

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All the fruit kept a beady eye on each other and there were many petty jealousies between them. When any of them started to impinge on the territory of others they were given a warning by the apple trees and the gardeners had to prune them way back. There were disputes over water and nutrients, especially in dry spells. Some of them were exposing themselves too much in the hot sunshine and the gardeners had to give them a top dressing. Others sometimes went on strike and refused to produce much in the way of fruit when they were deprived of water.

The Bramley apple tree, who had more experience in horticultural issues than the others, had long been concerned about the presence of the rhubarb plant in the fruit patch.

"Rhubarb is simply not a fruit," he told Granny Smith. "It's a vegetable."

"But people have it for dessert," she said.

"I know that. However, people can be very ignorant. A fruit is something which develops from a flower; a vegetable is something taken from another part of a plant – the leaves, stem or roots. By rights, people should eat the stalks of rhubarb with their main course, preferably uncooked."

There was no particular reason why it had to be uncooked, except the Bramley had no idea what happened to the stalks when they entered the house. Besides which, he really disliked the rhubarb.

"In that case, there are some plants in the vegetable patch which should be here with us," said Granny Smith. I'm thinking of the tomatoes, the cucumber, the pumpkins, the peppers and the aubergines – the egg plant, as I prefer to call it."

"You're dead right," replied the Bramley. "We must attempt to lure them here and to return the rhubarb to its proper place."

It was not just solidarity between fellow fruit that made Bramley feel this way. In the fruit patch, the actual plants stayed alive and intact after they had been picked. In the vegetable patch, on the other hand, once the vegetables had been picked, the rest of the plant was sent to the compost heap. This would also be the fate of the tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, peppers and aubergines. The Bramley could not allow this to happen to them.

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Thinking up a plan on how to achieve these aims was not so easy. Bramley asked the others for any ideas they might have. The blackberries suggested the tomatoes, peppers, and so on, should grow thorns and when they are picked, they would make the person drop them on the way back to the house, hopefully in the fruit patch. (The vegetables were always harvested first before the person went on to pick the fruit.)

The raspberries saw no problem – the tomatoes and other misplaced ‘fruit’ should do what they regarded as normal – send forth new suckers in the direction of the fruit patch until they arrived ‘home’.

Granny Smith thought that their mothers should go and collect them. As their mothers were nowhere around, the surrogate mother – Gloria the gardener – should replant them nearer to her, that is, Granny Smith, to look after. She would have a womanly word with her. Leave it up to the sisterhood to get things done, she said. The gooseberries did not seem to understand this, as they were not sure what being a mother involved.

The currants, many of whom were consumed by birds on a regular basis, said that the birds might be of assistance. Birds tended to perch on the branches of the pear tree before flying on to the bamboo supports for the peas and beans in the vegetable plot. If they were to eat the seeds of the plants in question - the tomatoes and cucumbers and so on - they might be persuaded to open their bowels when they passed back over the fruit patch. This would do nothing for the present generation of ‘fruits’ but would help with their offspring. How exactly to get the birds to unload in the right spots was another question.

“I have experience in that quarter,” said the rhubarb, which was located downhill from the currants. He had a reputation of making things happen in a very short time indeed.

“If some currants were to roll over to my bed, the birds would fly down to eat them as they came back in this direction. Before flying off again, they would be more than likely to have a nibble of my stalks while they are here. And bingo! I would have new neighbours next year – tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, peppers and aubergines.”

The strawberries, which were placed halfway between the currants and the rhubarb offered to help. They would send out runners onto which the fallen currants could land. When the wind came up, the runners would be blown in the direction of the rhubarb where the currants would be deposited. Then everything would come out as the rhubarb had planned.

The useful suggestion the rhubarb had made persuaded the others to let him stay. Everyone agreed that this plan would be worth trying and it was to be put into operation the following day.

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Sure enough, sparrows and blue-tits did fly over to the vegetable patch as predicted. But the plants in the fruit patch did not realise that these were not the regular ones, but birds who just happened to be visiting the area. After leaving the vegetable crops, they flew to the nearest tree to have a short rest before their departure flight was scheduled.

As the crow flies, which also applied to the sparrows and blue-tits, the nearest tree happened to be the fig tree in the hidden garden rather than the pear tree in the fruit patch. Here they took a fancy to the abundance of figs and feasted themselves upon them.

The figs worked as well as the rhubarb, in spite of the fact that all the birds poo-pooed the idea. The following year in the hidden garden there were new plants which surprised everyone – tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, peppers and aubergines. The walled enclosure there retained the heat and provided shelter from the wind and the plants thrived. The water-lily was astonished at the arrival of these new additions and the frog enjoyed the extra shade they provided on hot days.

Back in the fruit patch, the plants were very despondent that their plans had gone awry. For a while, the rhubarb kept itself to itself and the strawberry plant no longer produced any fruit. By the following year, though, all had been forgotten and the plants accepted where they all were. No-one ever mentioned the episode again...

...except the owner of the house who now was able to have fresh tomato and cucumber sandwiches in his hidden garden. He would have liked to follow the sandwiches with some fresh fruit and thought about planting some there beside the newly-arrived plants.

One day, the fruit and the 'fruit' may yet share a common home. It probably won't be for a long time yet. But no-one knows what the future, or should that be fruit-ure may hold.

## THE VEGETABLE PATCH

As opposed to the fruit patch, there was no hierarchy amongst the vegetables. All of them had a short life span and there was not enough time for a rigid class system to develop. That is not to say that they did not know their own value, but they competed with each other on a more level playing field, or rather vegetable patch. And boy, did they compete with each other!

The potatoes, divided into the earlies and the maincrop varieties, came from the same family and did not quarrel much because for some of the growing season, only one of them was present. The earlies were younger and smaller than their maincrop brothers. The latter, however, did not look down on their siblings.

But they did refer to their foreign staple equivalents – rice and pasta – as being much inferior to them. Mind you, neither had ever seen a miniscule white or brown rice plant, let alone any of the multi-shaped pasta plants. They had just overheard the gardeners talking about the Indian or Italian meal they had recently eaten.

The carrots and parsnips constantly teased each other on account of their different colour. The parsnips believed that the carrots must have been painted by the gardeners to make them look pretty. The carrots told them that if they had such good eyesight as they had, they would know perfectly well that it was their natural colour. Neither of them had a clue about why turnips were purple on top and white underneath – maybe they had a split personality.

None of the three had a kind word to say about the rutabaga or swede as it is known in Britain, which is yellow. The turnip was proud of his history – his ancestors had been around when dinosaurs existed on the planet, whereas the rutabaga/swede was the result of an illicit liaison between a turnip and a brassica, and was discovered only in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. The disdain towards it is probably why different vegetables were not grown in the same bed in order to prevent even more flirtatious behaviour and the strange offspring this might produce.

The relationship between peas and runner beans was never amicable, but they only rarely came face-to-face because the same area of the vegetable patch was given over to them only in alternate years. The peas had the nickname ‘cowboys’ and only had single bamboo supports; on the other hand, wigwams had to be provided for the runner beans.

One year, the man’s mother stayed at the house. She had written at Christmas-time to say that she would be coming, but the only vegetables she could eat were peas and beans. The man and his wife still wanted the usual vegetables they grew, so both peas and beans had to share the same strip of land. This was a challenge, not only for the gardeners, but for the plants themselves, both of which wanted to use the supports for themselves and tried to deprive their sworn enemy of having any at all.

There was a ferocious fight during between them one night which was won by the beans. In the morning, the gardeners discovered the pea plants lying flat out on the ground without any means of support. The gardeners assumed that it must have been the fault of the birds and erected a small scarecrow nearby, but this obviously had no effect. They then resorted to planting some nasturtiums between these different kinds of vegetables. The nasturtiums attracted hordes of aphids, which caused

the peas and beans to keep their distance from the nasturtiums and each other. This helped to keep the peas.

The cabbages and lettuces were also often at loggerheads. The lettuces knew they were very popular with the people in the house, being the main ingredient of their salads. The cabbages resented this, even though they were occasionally picked to go with savoury dishes. When the man and woman of the house went on holiday to Germany, they developed a liking for sauerkraut, which as you know is made from shredded cabbage. After that, sauerkraut was on the menu at home several times a week which boosted the popularity of the cabbage, and it no longer felt so inferior to the lettuce.

The onions got on well with the rest of the plants, even the garlics looked up to them. Everyone knew the onions, who were reputed to be highly intelligent and certainly not to be sneezed at, although they could make your eyes run. This rather alarmed the potatoes.

As mentioned earlier on, the tomatoes, cucumbers, pumpkins, aubergines and peppers considered they were out of place in the vegetable patch, but accepted their fate and got on with it. They spent a good deal of their time in the greenhouse, which made them feel rather special. Some of them remained there the whole time, much to the envy of their compatriots, except when the weather was very hot. But they did not have to contend with the wind in the greenhouse and were given plenty of water to drink. Other plants had a grudge against them for having these privileges, but nothing was ever said, as they were too busy complaining about each other to care much about them.

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One evening, after a particularly nasty day of heavy showers and cold winds, the biggest parsnip said to the others: "What a miserable life we're leading! When our time has come, we will all be consumed and our leaves, or roots in many cases, will be taken from here and thrown on to the scrap heap, or the compost heap, as humans call it."

An elderly onion said that it was not the end, merely the beginning, and they would be born again as fresh compost, which would be added to the beloved soil again. And in due course, they may re-emerge as a different kind of plant.

A disgruntled runner bean who clearly did not like the notion of coming back to life as a pea, spoke up: "I think we should put a stop to it. I'm a proud bean and do not want to end up as a has-bean."

"Maybe we ought to start up a new movement," said an early potato. "Animal-arianism."

They all looked blank at this.

"We have to persuade human beings to eat only animals; animals which eat nothing but grass or other animals, rather than us, vegetables. Then we could spend our whole lives here and die a natural death."

"Wonderful idea," agreed a young lettuce. "But we'll need help. Let's see if we can persuade the gardeners to help."

They all thought that might be the way forward.

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The next morning, Gloria, one of the gardeners, was met with some mysterious writing in the soil.

‘We don’t want to die’, it read. ‘Eat meat’.

She was taken aback by this political statement. On going over to the lettuces, she saw another sign: ‘My leaves are my leaves. Leave alone’.

In front of the carrots, turnips and rutabaga, a message read: ‘Hoots for roots’ - this was clearly designed to be read by any passing owls, rather than motorists who might have taken a wrong turning down a country lane.

Gloria told Godfrey, the other gardener. He read the riot act to the plants. They did not listen to him and pretended to shrivel up.

“OK,” he said. “None of you get any water today.”

The vegetables ignored his threat. It did not mean anything to them anyway as it came on to rain in the afternoon. The following day was dry, as was the day after that. When the sun beamed down upon them in the afternoon, the ground started to dry out.

The resistance by the vegetables was beginning to crumble. If they did not have any water soon, they might die. Finally, all of them gave in, reluctantly. They had hoped for some solidarity from the fruit, but none of the fruit had the same fate awaiting them and most of them did not care about the cause.

Being cut off from the other vegetables, the plants in the greenhouse did not join in the protest. Life was good for them, while it lasted. This gave rise to further antagonism between those vegetables outside and the plants in the greenhouse.

It was left to the elderly onion to end the feud and bring things back to earth again.

“It all boils down to reincarnation,” she said solemnly. “Like it or not.”

All the other plants looked at each other. None of them knew this word. They were not able to look it up, so they had to trust what she had said.

Following this failed uprising, the vegetables settled down to their lot again. The rivalries between them boiled up again, and life returned to normal, until one by one they were taken away and their remains were composted.

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The next year, a new lot of vegetables occupied the ground; generation V, as they were called. They were not politically motivated by anything. In fact, they seemed rather uninterested in anything at all. Maybe the struggles of the previous generation were all last year’s news. Or maybe it was because of another overlooked fact: they were really only vegetables. What could you expect?

## THE POTTING SHED

A man in a potting shed conjures up an image of an elderly, doddery gentleman contentedly smoking as he bends over a tray of seedlings and potters about in it all day long – the shed, not the tray.

Godfrey the gardener did not conform with this image, except that he, too, was often to be found contentedly smoking in the potting shed. He had developed a taste for certain weeds which he tried to propagate in the shed. Gloria, the other gardener who was once his girlfriend, showed her displeasure at his smoking on the job, pointing out the burn marks all over her.

The man of the house, seeing smoke emanating from the shed, assumed the gardeners were having yet another bonfire and was grateful that they were getting on with what they had to do. He very rarely went to the shed himself and left all the gardening tasks up to Godfrey and Gloria.

Gloria saw the potting shed as a place in which she could indulge her hobby of pottery. She had become an expert at throwing clay, but it was usually aimed at Godfrey rather than in making pots. On account of the smoke, she took to wearing a gas-mask in the shed at all times. If the owner of the house had seen her, he would have believed that preparations for world war three were taking place. But fortunately, he never did.

The seedlings in the shed were not so lucky in having gas masks. As a result, they tended to grow in strange ways. Some of them grew upside down with their roots uppermost and the stems deep in the pots. Others lolled about and grew sideways on. Another noticeable thing about them were the psychedelic colours of their flowers, many of which glowed in the dark. It was a good job, thought Gloria, that none of the edible plants went into the shed.

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It was in the shed that all the gardening implements were kept. Gloria objected strongly to them being referred to as tools. The only tool she knew about was Godfrey. In the hands of amateur gardeners, they may be tools, but to professionals they were implements.

Here, the lawn-mower was kept. The cans of petrol (gasoline) were kept outside ever since a little incident a few years ago, when Godfrey, who was smoking as usual, stood too close to one of them and suddenly lit up, literally. It took several months before his hair began to grow again. Gloria thought it had improved his appearance and was glad that she had not been in the shed at the time, although she would have enjoyed watching it happen.

The fork, the spade, the rake and the hoe each had a separate nail on the wall to hang them from. If any were placed in the wrong order, it played havoc in the garden. Godfrey always went by their position on the wall without looking closely at them, and used the implement he had grasped hold of to do what he was aiming to do. Consequently, the rake was sometimes used for digging, and the spade was used for raking the lawn. Godfrey was usually too high to notice what he was doing and most of the time he saw nothing wrong.

The hoe, which saved having to get rid of the weeds by hand, was the favourite implement of both of the gardeners. They sometimes almost came to blows as to who could use it. The argument was finally settled by buying another hoe; thus, there was his hoe and her hoe.

At Christmas one year, the man of the house thought a new hoe was needed. On a rare visit to the shed, he left it there on an unoccupied nail. Both gardeners saw it when they entered the shed and exclaimed together: "Hoe hoe hoe." The additional hoe was thereafter set aside for using just on Christmas Day. As they never worked then, it remained unused.

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The set of shears was tied to a string hanging from the ceiling. It was Godfrey's responsibility to cut the hedges. He was an admirer of topiary. One day, he decided to go one step further than cutting the hedge; he would shear it into the shape of an animal. He had no experience of this type of work, but was confident he could do it quite easily.

The animal he chose to portray started off being a lion. When he snipped off the head by mistake, he made some alterations and changed this into a sheep. This again went astray, having cut off its hind legs by accident. By cutting more off, he made an odd-looking rabbit without ears, and then ended up with a mouse, minus its tail. This was such a mini mouse that he could go no further.

Fired up with enthusiasm, he set to work on a second hedge, determined to make the shape of a bird. The ostrich, minus its beak, soon became an eagle without any wings, followed by a one-legged chicken, before finishing off as a tail-less sparrow. He gave up after that.

The set of hand-tools were Gloria's responsibility. She was said to have green fingers, but that was probably mould. What she planted often did not take, or suffered from fungus. She should by rights have tried growing mushrooms, but there was not much room left in the garden for them.

She was really good at handling secateurs, it has to be admitted, and her duty was to do all the pruning in the garden. She had never read how it should be done for different plants, so did it the same way for everything, even plants which did not require to be pruned, such as daffodils, tulips and snap dragons. On all of them she cut them down to ground level. After she had finished, the flower borders and rockery resembled an empty carpark rather than a garden. Godfrey always made a point of counting his fingers after she had been let loose on the secateurs.

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Outside the potting shed were numerous watering cans and a very long hosepipe next to a tap. This was the only tap in the garden and the person holding the end of the hosepipe had to enlist the help of the other gardener to turn on the tap. Godfrey, one day during a dry spell, thought he would have to water the lawn. This was a fair distance away from the shed. When he reached the lawn, he called back to Gloria to turn on the tap.

Gloria had got fed up with waiting and was busy pruning the Brussel sprouts. Godfrey put the end of the hosepipe down on the lawn and walked back to the shed to turn on the tap himself. Having done this, he set off back to where he had been. The hosepipe, left to its own devices, was now twisting and turning and writhing around, enjoying its moment of freedom, the sprays of water going in every direction.

Godfrey was prevented from reaching the end of the hosepipe, having to duck and dive to avoid being drowned. He turned around to go back to the shed. Gloria in the meantime, noticing a long twirling shape on the ground, assumed it must be a snake and attacked it with the secateurs causing



fountains of water to leap into the air where she had punctured the hose, soaking Godfrey on his way back to the tap.

When eventually the water was turned off and the hose had ceased to move, they realised that it was no longer possible to use it. They did not dare tell the man of the house. But in future, watering was always done using the watering cans, however long it took to do it. Refilling the pond in the hidden garden after the incident mentioned earlier, when it was completely drained, took the best part of a week. Both gardeners lost a lot of weight in the extra walking that this required.

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Pots of various sizes were kept outside the shed as it did not matter if they got wet in the rain. It was felt more necessary to keep the boxes of slug pellets and bags of fertiliser inside. It was a wise move, since no slugs were found in the shed and the plants that were kept in the shed, mainly weeds, thrived. Godfrey, for his own reasons, did not believe in weed-killer. Outside, however, the slugs occupied the pots in abundance. The fruit and vegetables, which could have done with some fertiliser, seldom got any as it was reserved for other things.

On windy days, the pots were blown about the garden, scattering the slugs far and wide. It was simply impossible to secure them all, especially since Gloria was producing new pots at a fast rate.

Godfrey's aged bicycle, which he left outside, except when it rained, did help keep some of the pots in their place when he rested it against them. Yet he was wary about leaving it anywhere around when Gloria was let loose with the secateurs, as he valued the tyres.

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On the other side of the path was the greenhouse. This was a place of refuge and a much sought-after place. It was where the gardeners took their breaks and ate their lunches (at different times from each other) and where they disappeared to, when something needed to be done which they did not want to do.

Apart from a few tomato plants, peppers, cucumbers and a solitary sickly pumpkin, plus a very lonely aubergine, it contained two deck-chairs, a rickety table holding several bottles of beer and a stack of women's magazines. As it became stiflingly hot in summer inside, the door was left open and fresh air blew from the cracks and holes in some of the windows.

It has to be said that the plants were kept well-watered. They were more than happy, as Gloria used to pour the dregs of the bottles of beer on to them. They re-paid this kindness by ripening before they were mature and growing very tall to reach the fresh air from the open windows to help sober up before toppling over down to the ground. At least, this made it easier for them to be picked.

The compost heap was right beside the greenhouse. It was a breeding ground for big fat slugs and a maternity ward for worms. It was the only well-functioning part of the garden and produced a vast quantity of compost. Most of this ended up in the soil or around the fruit bushes.

The remainder ended up wrapped in cigarette paper and smoked by Godfrey. It did not light well, but when it did, it gave him back his youthful vigour, or so he believed. In fact, all it did was to make him cough and wheeze which he associated with his youth. Gloria testified to that.

Her own youth was very different. She had much preferred to eat the compost as there was a female film-star who believed that it was highly nutritious and promoted beauty and a sense of well-being. It did not turn out that way for her and she gave it up, although she stressed that she was still young and had been for the past forty-nine years.

## THE HERB GARDEN

The chef liked to use a lot of herbs in his dishes: freshly picked herbs, if at all possible. For that reason, the herb garden was placed beside the path close to the house itself, so they could be obtained quickly and easily.

It was only a small area and the herbs were closely-packed together to leave no space for any weeds to grow. The chef did not allow the gardeners to tend to this patch as they were not knowledgeable about herbs. He preferred to do it all himself, which boiled down to doing nothing, bar snipping away at the different plants when he was in need of them.

The herbs did not like being in such close proximity to each other.

“It’s worse than being in the underground in London,” complained the basil to the borage.

The basil had overheard the man of the house talking about how crowded the underground trains were in London, when he had some business to attend to there one day.

“Since when have you known anything about the London underground?” the borage said to the basil.

“All of us know something about being underground,” chimed in the chives. “Or at least part of us. I suppose it’s the same up in London, wherever of whoever that is.”

The sage interrupted by telling them that London was the capital city of England. He had an aunt who lived there once, before the family moved to the country. She told him how she had to be taken by underground to the railway station.

“The passengers are packed together like sardines,” he informed them. “They are all jam-packed, very closely together.”

No-one else knew what a sardine was, possibly another kind of herb, but they had never come across one. Some of the herbs which had been taken indoors might have seen one, but word had not reached those outside.

“What’s a passenger?” pipped up the parsley.

“It’s someone who is taken somewhere else,” said the tarragon.

“You mean like us when we are taken indoors? Asked the parsley.

“I suppose it could be,” replied the tarragon.

“I wouldn’t mind being taken somewhere nice and warm,” commented the rosemary, “somewhere nice and sunny where I feel I belong.”

The lavender agreed wholeheartedly with her. She was a bit different from the others as she was not used for anything edible, but for her scent.

“You smell a bit off today,” the lemon balm remarked to her. There was a lot of rivalry between them.

“That’s not a nice thing to say,” stated the camomile, and turning to the lavender she said: “I’d hit him if I were you.”

“Calm down,” the borage whispered to the camomile. “What you need is a nice cup of tea.”

“I haven’t the time,” she answered.

“Did someone mention me?” asked the thyme.

“Go back to sleep,” marjoram said.

“I could help you do that,” the lavender offered, “but I’m not feeling myself today.”

“Then who...?” said the basil, but did not finish.

It was true that on one side of the lavender, the lemon balm was encroaching, while on the other, the mint was circling around her.

“I need some space,” said the lavender. “This is giving me a terrible headache.”

At the word ‘headache’, there was an uproar. All the other herbs claiming that they were best at treating headaches. There was nearly a punch-up. The aloe and arnica would have been ready to intervene, but they had recently been taken indoors when the chef had injured himself with a carving knife.

The sage told everyone to just relax. That caused another outcry as they all said that promoting relaxation was their department.

The shouting match has already given a lot of them sore throats which they would have to see to immediately, although the others said that they would be much better at treating that problem.

All around, blood pressure was rising and tempers fraying and each herb was competing to remedy each problem, giving rise to yet higher blood pressure and tempers becoming even more fraught.

Amidst the fracas, a loud voice suddenly rang out: “He’s coming!”

All the herbs immediately ceased their quarrelling and prepared themselves for the arrival of the chef. It was a new recipe he was trying out – one he had concocted himself – and he did not know which of the herbs he should use.

They sat there silently, without moving. The chef went up to the mint. Changed his mind and approached the tarragon. Again changed his mind and hovered over the rosemary. And then the sage. After a few minutes he shrugged his shoulders and went indoors to have another look at the recipe.

“Saved!” the herbs shouted together.

A few moments later, the chef came out again. In his hands was a huge cullender. He proceeded to go from one herb to another, snipping off leaves here and there, and then returned inside.

“Phew,” said the lavender. She was the only one that had been spared.

Her sense of relief was short-lived when less than five minutes later the woman of the house opened the door and marched straight up to the lavender, snipped off a few twigs and disappeared inside again

There was a long silence and then the basil spoke up: “Does anyone know what they’re eating today?”

“It must be sardines,” the borage said. “Yes, jam-packed sardines - just like they eat on the London underground.”

Everyone nodded their heads. It was time for a nap. There had been too much excitement for one day.

## FINAL WORDS

Of course, not every garden is like this. Some are much worse! But one thing is for sure: you'll never find such dreadful gardeners as these. The vast majority are highly-skilled and conscientious workers who take great pride in their work.

As far as the plants are concerned, though, only they can verify whether the confessions of the plants in this story are true. I would suggest, therefore, that you waste no opportunities in reading passages from this book to other plants to see what they think about it. As a warning: don't try this in your own garden – they may never speak to you again.

I'm referring instead to gardens which are open to the public. Some of the plants may be hard of hearing so be sure to read to them in a loud clear voice. They would also appreciate any large gestures and visible signs of emotion, particularly uncontrollable weeping. That really goes down well with them.

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Finally, some golden rules to remember when you are in the garden.

Always sniff your girlfriend before you smell the roses and then announce which has the best perfume.

Make sure to keep your dog on its lead on the grass, especially if it is wearing high-heels.

If you see a plant in a flower border that should be in the rockery, dig it up and transplant it.

Bring your own fig-leaf if you wish to visit the secluded garden. People without one may be severely slapped.

If you see any babies, place them under the gooseberry bush and inform the lady of the house immediately.

Remove any vegetable stalks from the compost heap and re-unite them with their next-of-kin in the ground.

If the gardener offers you something to smoke, accept it willingly, but remember to bring your own gasmask when you smoke it.

Never reveal that you are carrying a tin of sardines with you when you visit the herb garden as the herbs can take offence very easily.

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Enjoy your visit and make the most of the peace and tranquillity you will find in the garden. It may be an experience you will never forget.