

Gardens anthology

The Gardener - by Robert Louis Stevenson.

The gardener does not love to talk,
He makes me keep the gravel walk;
And when he puts his tools away,
He locks the door and takes the key.
Away behind the currant row
Where no one else but cook may go,
Far in the plots, I see him dig,
Old and serious, brown and big.
He digs the flowers, green, red, and blue,
Nor wishes to be spoken to.
He digs the flowers and cuts the hay,
And never seems to want to play.
Silly gardener! summer goes,
And winter comes with pinching toes,
When in the garden bare and brown
You must lay your barrow down.
Well now, and while the summer stays,
To profit by these garden days
O how much wiser you would be
To play at Indian wars with me!

The Glory of the Garden - by Rudyard Kipling.

Our England is a garden that is full of stately views,
Of borders, beds and shrubberies and lawns and avenues,
With statues on the terraces and peacocks strutting by;
But the Glory of the Garden lies in more than meets the eye.

For where the old thick laurels grow, along the thin red wall,
You will find the tool- and potting-sheds which are the heart of all ;
The cold-frames and the hot-houses, the dungpits and the tanks:
The rollers, carts and drain-pipes, with the barrows and the planks.

And there you'll see the gardeners, the men and 'prentice boys
Told off to do as they are bid and do it without noise;
For, except when seeds are planted and we shout to scare the birds,
The Glory of the Garden it abideth not in words.

And some can pot begonias and some can bud a rose,
And some are hardly fit to trust with anything that grows;
But they can roll and trim the lawns and sift the sand and loam,
For the Glory of the Garden occupieth all who come.

Our England is a garden, and such gardens are not made
By singing: –“Oh, how beautiful!” and sitting in the shade,
While better men than we go out and start their working lives
At grubbing weeds from gravel-paths with broken dinner-knives

There’s not a pair of legs so thin, there’s not a head so thick,
There’s not a hand so weak and white, nor yet a heart so sick.
But it can find some needful job that’s crying to be done,
For the Glory of the Garden glorifieth every one.

Then seek your job with thankfulness and work till further orders,
If it’s only netting strawberries or killing slugs on borders;
And when your back stops aching and your hands begin to harden,
You will find yourself a partner in the Glory of the Garden.

Oh, Adam was a gardener, and God who made him sees
That half a proper gardener’s work is done upon his knees,
So when your work is finished, you can wash your hand and pray
For the Glory of the Garden, that it may not pass away!
And the Glory of the Garden it shall never pass away!

Garden Love by Juliana Horatia Ewing.

Every child who has gardening tools,
Should learn by heart these gardening rules:
He who owns a gardening spade,
Should be able to dig the depth of its blade.
He who owns a gardening rake,
Should know what to leave and what to take.
He who owns a gardening hoe,
Must be sure how he means his strokes to go.
But he who owns a gardening fork,
May make it do all the other tools’ work
Though to shift, or to pot, or annexe what you can,
A trowel’s the tool for child, woman, or man.
“Twas the bird that sits in the medlar-tree,
Who sang these gardening saws to me.

The Lodging-House Fuchsias - by Thomas Hardy.

Mrs. Masters’s fuchsias hung
Higher and broader, and brightly swung,
Bell-like, more and more
Over the narrow garden-path,

Giving the passer a sprinkle-bath
In the morning.
She put up with their pushful ways
And made us tenderly lift their sprays,
Going to her door:
But when her funeral had to pass
They cut back all the flowery mass
In the morning.

The Seed-Shop - by Muriel Stuart.

Here in a quiet and dusty room they lie,
Faded as crumbled stone or shifting sand,
Forlorn as ashes, shrivelled, scentless, dry -
Meadows and gardens running through my hand.

In this brown husk a dale of hawthorn dreams;
A cedar in this narrow cell is thrust
That will drink deeply of a century's streams;
These lilies shall make summer on my dust.

Here in their safe and simple house of death,
Sealed in their shells, a million roses leap;
Here I can blow a garden with my breath,
And in my hand a forest lies asleep.

Deer In The Garden - by Noel Avis.

Come and see my lovely garden with its borders, beds and shrubs
Take a look at the wisteria, the camellias in tubs
Admire the antirrhinums the gardenias and stocks
The asters and surfinias and towering hollyhocks

Marvel at the fuchsia, hydrangea and sweet pea
the pale nicotiana beneath the apple tree
Sniff the fragrant jasmine, peruse the passion flower
See an old man's beard entwined within a virgin's bower

But where (I hear you ask) are all the roses in their prime?
The Iceberg and Hot Chocolate or Celebration Time?
The hostas have all vanished, no begonias are left
And gaily painted pansy plants - of blooms they are bereft!

The buds have all been eaten, the petals all consumed
There are neatly scissored stalks where fine blossoms should have bloomed
The Lizzies are not busy, the lilies are not fair
The roses are all naked, petunias all laid bare

A deer's been in my garden. It's very plain to see
He's nibbled by the sunken pond, He's munched behind the tree
He's grazed around the garden gnomes, no flower is left to smell
This heavenly perfumed Shangri la is now an elkish hell!

So, I built a five foot wooden fence, nailed trellis to the top
Put chairs and crates across the gaps, the hungry beast to stop
Daubed potions made with chilli, garlic (egg to make it stick)
I bought a life size cardboard lion. But nothing's done the trick

So what to do I hear you cry - I'll cut straight to the core
A Beanfield Sniper's on my lap, and soon you'll hear it roar
And if you look towards the shed, some antlers you will see
I'll make some comfy deerskin slippers - and there'll be venison for tea!

My Garden with Walls - by William Brooks 1918.

My heart a garden is, a garden walled;
And in the wide white spaces near the gates
Grow tall and showy flowers, sun-loving flowers,
Where they are seen of every passer-by;
Who straightway faring on doth bear the tale
How bright my garden is and filled with sun.

But there are shaded walks far from the gates,
So far the passer-by can never see,
Where violets grow for thoughts of those afar,
And rue for memories of vanished days,
And sweet forget-me-nots to bid me think

With tenderness, - lest I grow utter cold
And hard as women grow who never weep.

And when come times I fear that Love is dead
And Sorrow rules as King the world's white ways,
I go with friends I love among these beds.
Where friend and flower do speak alike to me,
Sometimes with silences, sometimes with words.

'Tis then I thank my God for those high walls
That shut the friends within, the world without,
That passers-by may only see the sun.
That friends I love may share the quiet shade.

Their Lonely Betters - by W.H. Auden, 1950.

As I listened from a beach-chair in the shade
To all the noises that my garden made,
It seemed to me only proper that words
Should be withheld from vegetables and birds.

A robin with no Christian name ran through
The Robin-Anthem which was all it knew,
And rustling flowers for some third party waited
To say which pairs, if any, should get mated.

Not one of them was capable of lying,
There was not one which knew that it was dying
Or could have with a rhythm or a rhyme
Assumed responsibility for time.

Let them leave language to their lonely betters
Who count some days and long for certain letters;
We, too, make noises when we laugh or weep:
Words are for those with promises to keep.

Lodged - by Robert Frost.

The rain to the wind said,
'You push and I'll pelt.'
They so smote the garden bed
That the flowers actually knelt,
And lay lodged - though not dead.
I know how the flowers felt.

Sowing - by Edward Thomas.

It was a perfect day
For sowing; just
As sweet and dry was the ground
As tobacco-dust.

I tasted deep the hour
Between the far
Owl's chuckling first soft cry
And the first star.

A long stretched hour it was;
Nothing undone
Remained; the early seeds
All safely sown.

And now, hark at the rain,
Windless and light,
Half a kiss, half a tear,
Saying good-night.

DIGGING (1) - by Edward Thomas.

Today I think
Only with scents, - scents dead leaves yield,
And bracken, and wild carrot's seed,
And the square mustard field;

Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the roots of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns.

It is enough
To smell, to crumble the dark earth,
While the robin sings over again
Sad songs of Autumn mirth.

The Mower Against Gardens - by Andrew Marvell.

Luxurious man, to bring his vice in use,
Did after him the world seduce,
And from the fields the flowers and plants allure,
Where nature was most plain and pure.
He first enclosed within the gardens square
A dead and standing pool of air,

And a more luscious earth for them did knead,
Which stupified them while it fed.
The pink grew then as double as his mind;
The nutriment did change the kind.
With strange perfumes he did the roses taint,
And flowers themselves were taught to paint.
The tulip, white, did for complexion seek,
And learned to interline its cheek:
Its onion root they then so high did hold,
That one was for a meadow sold.
Another world was searched, through oceans new,
To find the Marvel of Peru.
And yet these rarities might be allowed
To man, that sovereign thing and proud,
Had he not dealt between the bark and tree,
Forbidden mixtures there to see.
No plant now knew the stock from which it came;
He grafts upon the wild the tame:
That th' uncertain and adulterate fruit
Might put the palate in dispute.
His green seraglio has its eunuchs too,
Lest any tyrant him outdo.
And in the cherry he does nature vex,
To procreate without a sex.
Tis all enforced, the fountain and the grot,
While the sweet fields do lie forgot:
Where willing nature does to all dispense
A wild and fragrant innocence:
And fauns and fairies do the meadows till,
More by their presence than their skill.
Their statues, polished by some ancient hand,
May to adorn the gardens stand:
But howsoe'er the figures do excel,
The gods themselves with us do dwell.

The Garden and the Gardener - by Kenneth Steven.

I stand and watch the evening come –
the ripening light that fills the glades with gold,
this stillness I have lived and grown for forty years.

And sometimes in the morning there are deer
that come and drink the water from the pond
and watch the silence wary for a sound.

I cannot send them scared away but stand
in shadow watching them and knowing now
that this is theirs as much as it is mine.

That this frail earth was never meant for man
to wall and claim his own. Instead it was a gift
to leave behind more beautiful and free.

This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison - by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

Well, they are gone, and here must I remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings, such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimm'd mine eyes to blindness! They, meanwhile,
Friends, whom I never more may meet again,
On springy heath, along the hill-top edge,
Wander in gladness, and wind down, perchance,
To that still roaring dell, of which I told;
The roaring dell, o'erwooded, narrow, deep,
And only speckled by the mid-day sun;
Where its slim trunk the ash from rock to rock
Flings arching like a bridge;—that branchless ash,
Unsun'd and damp, whose few poor yellow leaves
Ne'er tremble in the gale, yet tremble still,
Fann'd by the water-fall! and there my friends
Behold the dark green file of long lank weeds,
That all at once (a most fantastic sight!)
Still nod and drip beneath the dripping edge
Of the blue clay-stone.

Now, my friends emerge
Beneath the wide wide Heaven—and view again
The many-steeped tract magnificent
Of hilly fields and meadows, and the sea,
With some fair bark, perhaps, whose sails light up
The slip of smooth clear blue betwixt two Isles
Of purple shadow! Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
And hunger'd after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue Ocean! So my friend
Struck with deep joy may stand, as I have stood,
Silent with swimming sense; yea, gazing round

On the wide landscape, gaze till all doth seem
Less gross than bodily; and of such hues
As veil the Almighty Spirit, when yet he makes
Spirits perceive his presence.

A delight

Comes sudden on my heart, and I am glad
As I myself were there! Nor in this bower,
This little lime-tree bower, have I not mark'd
Much that has sooth'd me. Pale beneath the blaze
Hung the transparent foliage; and I watch'd
Some broad and sunny leaf, and lov'd to see
The shadow of the leaf and stem above
Dappling its sunshine! And that walnut-tree
Was richly ting'd, and a deep radiance lay
Full on the ancient ivy, which usurps
Those fronting elms, and now, with blackest mass
Makes their dark branches gleam a lighter hue
Through the late twilight: and though now the bat
Wheels silent by, and not a swallow twitters,
Yet still the solitary humble-bee
Sings in the bean-flower! Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty! and sometimes
'Tis well to be bereft of promis'd good,
That we may lift the soul, and contemplate
With lively joy the joys we cannot share.
My gentle-hearted Charles! when the last rook
Beat its straight path along the dusky air
Homewards, I blest it! deeming its black wing
(Now a dim speck, now vanishing in light)
Had cross'd the mighty Orb's dilated glory,
While thou stood'st gazing; or, when all was still,
Flew creaking o'er thy head, and had a charm
For thee, my gentle-hearted Charles, to whom
No sound is dissonant which tells of Life.

The Little White Rose - by Hugh MacDiarmid

The rose of all the world is not for me.
I want for my part
Only the little white rose of Scotland
That smells sharp and sweet—and breaks the heart.

Within that house secure he hides,
When danger imminent betides
Of storm, or other harm besides
Of weather.

Give but his horns the slightest touch,
His self-collecting power is such,
He shrinks into his house, with much
Displeasure.

Where'er he dwells, he dwells alone,
Except himself has chattels none,
Well satisfied to be his own
Whole treasure.

Thus, hermit-like, his life he leads,
Nor partner of his banquet needs,
And if he meets one, only feeds
The faster.

Who seeks him must be worse than blind,
(He and his house are so combin'd)
If, finding it, he fails to find
Its master.

My Garden - by Thomas Edward Brown.

A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!
Rose plot,
Fringed pool,
Ferned grot—
The veriest school
Of peace; and yet the fool
Contends that God is not—
Not God! in gardens! when the eve is cool?
Nay, but I have a sign;
'Tis very sure God walks in mine.

And to finally lower the tone, some gardening limericks - by Maurice Wilkins.

A gardener from old Casablanca
Sought a cure for a date palm with canca.
He found expert advice
Sadly less than precise
As they hadn't a lingua franca.

A gardening enthusiast from Harris,
Grew a wonderfully vigorous Phalaris.
This grass was so pampered
It expanded unhampered,
And emerged through a grating in Paris!

A botanist keen on his gerberas
Tried to hybridise them with schlumbergeras.
But his worthy ambition
Brought him no recognition,
Though at least it deterred all the burglars!

A plantsman who gardened with danger,
Grew a monstrously hairy Hydrangea.
Its excessive hirsuteness
Lost it some of its cuteness -
It was cut to the ground by a stranger!

A hedger who hated forsythia
Couldn't stand escallonia either.
He wondered "How could I
Choose which one I should buy?"
So he ended up going for neither!