

# *The Garden of My Life*

Claire Simons

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I feel that in some ways, the best method of describing my life up until this point is with flowers. The uniqueness of each blossom projects into me a memory with which it is associated, therefore giving a picture more clear than mere words could do. The bright and varied colors, the drifting fragrance, the exciting shapes and forms of petals—each plays its own role in enhancing thoughts and feelings. Some may bring a whole period of life to mind, a series of stories too intertwined to separate. And some may bring a single moment or emotion, unrelated to anything but that flower.

And, of course, our lives are nothing but a series of memories. By using flowers to evoke these memories, I can, in essence, relive my life simply by being in the presence of a beautiful object, and the more of these objects there are, the stronger the recollection. Therefore, the single most powerful way to see my life is through the guise of a garden.

In my garden, the seemingly endless breadth is separated into bright segments by a variety of walls, hedgerows and pathways. The sections each sport a magnificent variety of blossoms within a single species.

In each area the ground shimmers with color, blurred when viewed from afar and materializing as I approach, and right in the center of each I can see another version of myself, as if I were looking in a mirror. And yet, each of these forms of myself is somehow different, as is the scene that surrounds the other me.

Each piece of this garden, like a piece of a puzzle, is a different place altogether.

The first inner garden that I wander through seems to be a rose garden, the light around me turning from the sunny afternoon that it had just been to the harsh grey smoke of the morning sky. All around me are towering plants, their buds bursting out into the air, providing vibrant points of color against this dreary backdrop. I bend to smell one, its scent light and delicate, that of a rose but sweeter. It smells almost like watermelon. The flower has broad, curling, orange petals, its bloom much wider than my small hands.

And then I notice, my hands have grown smaller, my arms have reduced in length and so have my legs. I am back in the body of a child, again a six year old, dipping my nose into a colorful flower. But something is not quite right, a building has appeared before me and its form is familiar yet disquieting. The cold, grey air serving to further this mood, and I can hear the sound of crows cawing from the roof. The building itself is a house, with a low roof, and it is painted in a murky off-white. I begin to back away, this scene is something from far back in my memory, so far back that I can barely reach it, so far back that I cannot even begin to remember its significance.

There are people I know here; I can feel their presence. I think for a moment, slowly coming to the conclusion that they must be inside the house, so I take a step forwards, searching for the door. Through the massive rose bushes it finally becomes visible, and I pull it open by the handle, stepping inside and sliding it shut behind me. At first, there is no one here, but figures soon begin to appear. The first is a baby in a high-chair, a Christmas-themed bib adorning her neck. Beside her appear the parents, first a mother with long, brown hair and a broad smile, and then the bespectacled father with dark hair and a quiet, loving face. The grandmother crosses the room to bring a bottle that has been heating; she smiles as the baby hiccups loudly. But as soon as the characters have come they are gone, their bodies fading back into the linoleum countertop and cabinets.

I hear screaming, that of a small child, and I move towards the sound. It is coming from an old room down the hallway, a tacky oriental rug covering the floor. I can feel its itchy surface even through the soles of my shoes, and it makes my skin crawl. The child on the floor seems to be about three years old and is playing with a toy set on the ground. Around her sit the mother again, still with her long, dark hair, and the grandmother with her short, silver locks and kind smile.

Again they are gone, hardly a moment after I had seen them at first, but it only takes me a moment to hear the murmur of voices from the front room, and I return, past the entrance to the kitchen and into a sort of library space. The walls lined with bookshelves, each one adorned with glass figurines. One is a woman in old-fashioned clothing, colorful balloons spiraling from her grip, so real and candy-like that they disturb the eerie aura of the room itself. It distracts me for only a second before I turn to see the people again, this time the mother, father and grandmother all standing with the child, possibly five years old, placing a potted tree, a poor replacement for a Douglass Fir, onto a table in the corner in preparation for the Christmas season. And they are all gone again, and I find myself migrating towards the wall to look up from my small stature, still in my six year old form, into a painting of a sailboat being rocked by a terrible storm.

When I turn around from my distraction there are people everywhere—pushing, shoving, taking things from shelves and drawers and tables. I see the mother and father, but I do not see the child, and then I look down at my hands. I am that child. But still, something is missing. The grandmother is gone, and in her place is an emptiness. A sadness being experienced.

Suddenly the crowd of people surges forward; I can see the tears in their eyes, but I do not feel the pain that they do. They are approaching, and suddenly they are on me, pushing and shoving me towards the door. They seem to multiply—aunts and uncles, cousins, friends of friends—and then I am out. The people are gone, as is the house. Both disappeared into thin air. All that remain are the rose bushes, each of which is raining petals, quickly ridding themselves of blossoms. I am being showered in orange and violet, in white and pink and red and yellow, and I continue to run as if I am being pushed until I am out of the rose garden and standing on a path that leads, windingly, towards the next patch of flowers.

As I reach it, I can see tulips springing like lollipops from the earth. Their bright colors remind me of childhood, and they exist in so many varieties that it takes me a long moment to take in the vast amount of hues. There are yellow, red and blue tulips—bright primaries in one area, fading to pastels in another. A third is covered in flowers that have spiked leaves and stripes, curled petals and patches of exotic colors. Finally, my eyes light on a figure, darting between curving olive trees. Quickly another appears, and then there are dozens of children running and laughing, chasing after some unseen prize.

As I near the grove, the scene becomes clearer. Hundreds of what I thought were tulips are, instead, shiny, plastic eggs. The children pick them up and toss them into their baskets. And then I am there too, in a bright yellow raincoat, my head barely reaching the lowest branches of the trees. I can see my parents smiling at me from off in the distance as I hurriedly thrust the plastic eggs into my own basket, barely stopping to check what they might hold.

The hunt gets more frenzied as more eggs are grabbed. Everyone around me seems to have more of them than I do, but I don't care. I'm not interested in the prizes they contain or the competition of the game; I am a child. All I want is to run and laugh in this great field of childish flowers, playing our childish game and laughing in that childish way of ours.

And as the game nears its end, I can feel time creeping up on me. I can't keep playing like this forever; I will have to stop at some point. Sit down like a good little girl and grow up. But I don't want to, I want to keep playing on and on until the sun sets and the cold air begins to creep through my raincoat. So, as the other children return to their parents with their collections, I continue to search for my eggs, hoping that the promise of more will tie me to my game.

But I can't keep playing, and soon my parents come up. They comfort me for not finding the most eggs out of all the children there, but that's not really what I am sad about. I cry to them, not out loud, but in my mind. In reality, I simply ask them, "Next year?"

No, not next year, they smile. I'm too old. Next year I have to play with the big kids.

So I walk slowly out of the garden, clutching each of their hands tightly in mine until they slowly disappear out of my grasp and I am returned to my journey alone.

Behind me the tulips sink slowly back to earth, their bright orbs of color no longer candy in my eyes, and ahead of me rise two rows of enormous trees, towering above me and shading the ground.

I travel down the walkway for what seems like ages. Everything around me is covered in greenery so that I cannot see where I am headed. Soon the leaves begin to shimmer in the light, as if coated with a slivery dust. The bushes rustle slightly as if there were something about to leap out of them. I walk so long that I feel as if my legs will fall off, and then a bright light appears.

I step out into the sun. The air is cold but the sky is a brilliant shade of blue. In front of me is a great lawn, covered with unruly grass that reaches past my knees, and through it winds a well-worn path, leading still forwards. I step unsteadily onto it, tired, and as the hedges behind me drift out of my sight, I can see this new landscape.

Bushes thirty feet wide spring from the grass randomly—their bright, fuzzy foliage spraying out infinitely. Flowers in bright colors, reds, pinks and violets nearly blind me. And beyond the massive bushes stand ruined castles, growing as organically as the flora out of the landscape. Their walls are encrusted in vines and mosses, and though they have long since been abandoned, they still hold the shine of life about them.

I move towards a castle, curious as to what might lie inside. The entire landscape seems to be empty of beings, and this is reflected in the peaceful quiet that surrounds me. As I reach the castle, I look up, its height even more imposing than from afar. Its entryway, the door long since decayed, is more than twice my height. I step inside, and here I can see plants creeping in through the cracks in the walls. Even the massive rhododendrons have begun to sneak in through the slit-like windows carved into the stone.

Movement in a corner captures my eye, and yet, when I turn, there is nothing there. So I progress forward, finding a weathered staircase in the next hallway, whose walls are crumbling away to reveal the light of sun. I climb upwards and when I reach the next floor I am stunned by the view.

Where a room must have once stood, the floor is gone, replaced by dirt and shrubs, clinging weeds taking the place of carpeting and vines posing as tapestries. Two of three walls are gone and I can see into the open landscape where hundreds of thousands of rhododendron bushes part for a massive waterfall, pouring through their opening. I turn my head and look back at the grassy area, and through the bushes I see a figure rise up.

The only animal life in this beautiful land, a white mare's form appears, its coat shining white in the brilliant sunlight. It reminds me of a story I once knew—the king of fairies in the

rolling hills of Ireland had a steed just as this. And I can almost make out the king's form as the horse steps quickly out of sight back into the mass of flowers.

I sigh, not wanting to leave and yet knowing that I have to. I wander slowly down the stairs and out the castle door, pausing for only a quick look back. To my surprise, the plants are retreating down the sides, the castle's brick finding their hold once again, tapestries reforming on the walls, and a white horse striding confidently behind the fortress. But I know it can't be real, so I face forward again and walk back towards the hedgerows, back towards my real life, and all around me the rhododendrons close up their blooms and shrink in size, no longer majestic beings but now simply flowers.

It is another long hike toward the next flower-coated landscape, and yet this one appears oddly similar to the last. However, instead of the majestic castles and seemingly magical flowers, this one is strangely plain. It is covered in the same lush, green grass, the smell is similar and I can hear water gurgling nearby. But where the massive rhododendrons once stood, I now see a ground covered in clusters of California poppies, their bright orange heads turned upwards in the sunlight.

It would be a charming view to someone who was not raised around the flowers, but to me their blossoms are common, their oranges seemingly dulled by routine and their blooms too small to be exciting. They even cling low to the ground, so as to suggest a close-knit relation to the dirt and grasses that surround them.

Mimicking the flowers in their dullness are low, sloping houses covering the meadow. They all look the same, sporting wooden siding and roofs that seem to roll with the hills. I can't tell one from another, and so I continue by them, hoping for a landmark to find my way.

Soon I can hear the crashing of the ocean, and turning my head only slightly to the left, I can see it too. Its waves are huge and rolling, capped with white amid the seething greens and blues. It seems so out of place in this area which seems so familiar. The ocean's surface hides so many mysteries compared to this over-explored landscape. I go to it and sit quietly on a rock above the crashing waves. Below me is a twenty-foot drop to the surface, and I find it difficult to suppress my fear of falling. And yet, the scene is calming. Somewhere familiar, with a peace not associated with home, and just beyond it the promise of discovery.

I nearly find myself dozing off when I hear a call. At first I do not recognize it, then something in my mind remembers the voice. Looking around, I can see that it is growing dark, and all around me, the lights in the houses are flicking on and off. I can see silhouettes in the windows for a brief second, but they move too quickly for me to determine their form.

I turn around, suddenly afraid, and rush away from the cliff, down a winding path covered in low-hanging trees. Inside it is pitch black, but after only a moment I am out on a street. I see an empty lot to my right and instinctively run to it. A child rushes out onto the grass, playing in the dark as if it were midday. All around her, tiny sprouts are poking their heads out of the ground. She suddenly disappears, and onto the site rush a crew of builders, their faces obscured by shadows from their hardhats.

They are building, pouring a foundation, and the sprouts on the ground are reaching upwards, sprouting their first, tiny leaves. Up go the walls and the stems grow higher. The girl is back, older now, playing with a friend on the building equipment and smiling, but she is still a child.

And up goes the second floor, the siding, soon the roof. The tiny plants are inching higher, sprouting true leaves and buds. The sun is rising now beyond the cliffs, over the ocean.

Suddenly everything stops. The flowers stop growing, the house is left unfinished, the still sun hangs in the sky. The girl sits on the edge of the rough porch and mournfully stares out at the sea.

But it seems to only take a moment for it to restart, and the building progresses. I can see through the windows into the dining room where furniture is being pushed into place. I walk cautiously to the door to click it open, knowing it will be unlocked. And then I step inside. A dog rushes up to me, barking and wiggling furiously. I scratch her absentmindedly and head for the stairs. I climb them and see the main room, spreading into the dining room, surrounded on all sides by wide windows. Ignoring the scent from the kitchen, I walk to the deck and walk out.

The poppies that were a moment ago just buds are now in full bloom. The sun is at the top of its path. The house is completed, its brown siding looking just like that of all the homes surrounding it, but its roof reaches just a bit taller, like a poppy growing just a bit out of its patch.

I look around for the girl, returning inside. I search the house thoroughly, finally ending up in a luxurious bathroom. I stare at the shower for a moment, glance at the sink, then into the mirror.

The girl looks just like a poppy, the same as everyone else. There is nothing remarkable, except that she stands just a bit taller than the rest, whether from intelligence, beauty, or simply undeserved pride. She stands taller.

Contemplating the sameness of everything and what might lie just beyond, I progress back down the stairs and outside. The poppies around the house grow taller and taller; they soon surpass any reasonable height and reach past my knees to my waist as I wade through them. Soon they are taller than I am, and soon they reach the roof of the house, moving ever upwards. I have to push harder and harder to get through, until I burst out of them and onto a road. It is cold, hard concrete, taking the form of a highway. There are no cars, so I step bravely into its center and begin the long walk home.

The walk to my final garden seems endless, and as I reach it, the petals of the new plants become clearer as I approach, as if they were being unveiled by fog. I finally reach the new garden, its spaces forested by massive bushes of camellias, their oriental petals smiling back at me in a light that is somehow warmer, yet cool and autumnal. I suddenly feel exhaustion overtake me, and I wander towards the new building. Its walls are dark grey and shielded by more camellias—their pink, white and red blooms bursting through dark foliage.

It only takes a moment for me to fall asleep in the familiar space. Here I am at home, here I am comforted, and yet I feel a twinge of excitement beginning to stir in the back of my mind as I drift off.

The room is dark and cool; the walls are painted a vibrant shade of violet, and over the windows hang thick, blue curtains. It smells of home—a comforting scent. A scent that is different to everyone, as the scent of a flower is unique to its bloom. Smell has always been important to me. I cannot think of a smell that does not bring with it vivid memories of something I have done or somewhere I have been in the past.

I lie in my bed in the corner; dawn is just arriving and I can feel its pressure on my eyelids. I open my eyes a second before the alarm goes off, and when it does, I smack the “off” button with my hand. Usually I hit snooze and roll over, for school does not start for another hour, but today I am far from groggy. Today is special, and my eyes shine with excitement; after just a moment I roll out of my bed, my bare feet smacking the hardwood floor. It is cold and it stings, but I ignore the pain as I rush across the room, flinging open the door but careful not to smash the mirror (this coming from experience).

Only ten or twenty seconds elapse from the moment my feet hit the floor to the moment my front door bursts open and I rush outside in my pajamas. The cool October air hits my skin suddenly, and with it, comes several new smells. It smells like excitement, like fall, and like a new day, even a new beginning.

The smell is an interesting mixture of rain that steams off the bricks of the patio, green moss that lines the ground, and camellias. Camellias embody fall. With fall comes a dozen and a half things that I wait for every day for an entire year—my favorite holidays, my birthday, my favorite weather, colors, friends, excitement and newness. There are a thousand things I love about fall, and for that reason, each and every time I walk through my yard, I stop to sniff the beautiful oriental bushes that sprout to nearly ten feet tall and are adorned with an assortment of flowers—pale pink, white, magenta, red, and white-and-pink striped.

In my excitement, I rush out of the courtyard and into the camellia-filled landscape, where more buds are blooming on the large bushes. Their colors become brighter and brighter, the time passes faster and faster, and I can feel the excitement building for the future. I do not know what will come, but I know that I am ready for it.

## Bibliography

*(Note: no information from these sources was used in the formulation of my essay.)*

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