IN THE GARDEN

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IN THE GARDEN

I am writing in the garden. To write as one should of a garden one must not write outside it or merely somewhere near it, but in the garden.

All my life I have been a passionate gardener—since I was seven years old and hung over a border of small flowers I do not now know the name of, which tiny long-remembered things grew round a small bed in the centre of the few yards of iron-railed front garden before a house in an old square in the ugliest, smokiest factory town to be found anywhere in all the North of England.

I have lived a thousand years since then, but I still feel them—the little pink and blue and white creatures who had the courage and determination to force themselves through the soot-soaked soil and
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boldly live surrounded by the tall factory chimneys
pouring forth smoke which tarnished even the white
clouds and blue sky.

I wonder what they were.

I have had many gardens in many countries, but I
have not seen them since.

Wheresoever I go I can never leave the earth alone.
I must make some bit of it into a garden while I am
near it.

I have made gardens in queer places. If that were
not quite another story it would be amusing to relate
the history of how gardens can be made to spring up
in places where they are horribly wanted — not large
gardens and not through spending much money. But
still gardens.

As long as one has a garden one has a future; and
as long as one has a future one is alive. It is remaining
alive which makes life worth living — not merely re-
main ing on the surface of the earth. And it is the look-

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ing forward to a future which makes the difference
between the two states of being.

There are a number of things and conditions which
will provide futures if time and interest are given to
them, but no one of them seems so natural, so simple
and so alluring as making a garden.

To the gardener in the winter one's future is the
spring. All the dark months may be filled by it.

To live in brilliantly colored and eloquent catalogues
is to dream dreams unlike all others that glorify our
days; to pore over gardening books is to glow with
joy, ambition and flaming desire for loveliness, color,
fragrance and still, sweet delight.

In the spring, which is the future of the darkest
winter days, the garden one's imagination sees is car-
peted in its first hours with crocuses and dazzling blue
scillas, golden cushions and borders of alyssum saxa-
tile, purple mats of aubrieta; in its second hours daf-
fodils and jonquils fill every corner and are only

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crowded out by white narcissuses and tulips of every shade of scarlet and white, and iris of every tint of yellow and violet and lavender and blue, with azalea bushes flaming coral or thrilling rose here and there behind or between.

The summer, which is to be the future of the spring, finds one almost reeling before its first outburst of roses of all blushes and pallors and sunlight — yellows and crimsons — and carries on with the blues and violets and flushed turquoise of delphiniums and the splendors of every other shade and color in the world.

The autumn is a flare of golden trumpets singing in all-brilliant tones the triumph of the past year and heralding the future of the spring for which the winter will prepare.

As long as one has a garden one has a future, and as long as one has a future one is alive.

If while living in one's own garden one could simply relate day by day the things which happen in it, the things which happen to it, the things which happen to the gardener! What a human document the record would end by becoming! What a revelation of one's power to imagine and one's determination to create! Also, if it were done faithfully, how practical and useful it would be!

It is only personal experience which provides actual facts and information.

The daily story should be told faithfully and in simple phrases. And the gardener should be of a gay and valiant spirit. How can it be possible to complain of a garden or a flower?

It need not be a large garden which provides the daily record. The smallest patch of earth will serve.

To plant a packet of seeds, whether in a greenhouse in March or in a garden bed in May; to water them with the proper delicacy and restraint; to watch until the first tiny ghost of a leaf pushes aside the soil; to cry out with joy at the sight of it and then perhaps to dis-
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cover that it is only a weed; to wait again, to wait longer than you thought you must wait; then after coming again and again and finding nothing, to arrive one day to see a small thrusting leaf once more, and then not one but another and another and at last a whole regiment of small valiant green soldiers marching in a row all crying aloud, “We are alive! We have come from the Outside into the Garden! We are here — here!”

Oh, well! There is a thrill in it, and one never gets over the sense of the mystery and the wonder. That is always new and startling as the spring is.

First just the tiny seeds — little black things — twenty-five cents a packet; then the breathless waiting while the soft, silent, black earth seems to be doing nothing. Then under the black earth slow, soft, unseen stirring. And then suddenly out of the darkness leaps life — life!

I have a theory that every one in the world really wants a garden, though many perhaps are not conscious of their need. There are thousands and thousands of women, and it may be as many men, who know they want to work in the earth and breathe the sweet damp scent of it and make things grow, but they think it is not possible for them to do it.

They think their bit of earth, their small back yard or front yard, is too small or too sandy or too shady. But nothing is too small to grow a flower — nothing is too sandy to be enriched and made fertile. Shade is the greatest obstacle to bloom, but there are ferns which grow in the shade and a number of things which will even bloom in it, if it is not of the darkness of a cellar.

And I am speaking to the thousands of people who are living on farms or in country places where, to quote Lavengro:

“Life is sweet, brother! There’s day and night, brother! both sweet things; sun, moon and stars,
brother! all sweet things: There is likewise a wind on the heath."

One cannot murmur words like these to oneself when one lives in great cities where life is rank with the stench of petrol, day and night are roaring pandemonium, and sun, moon and stars seem not to belong to the system of things in which one is conscious only of smells and increasing uproar and the crowding of human bodies crushing past each other, while on all sides machinery drills and hammers, tearing down walls and roofs, reducing structures which once were homes to masses of bricks and mortar and flying clouds of dust.

Sitting under my special oak tree in my garden — it is always spoken of merely as "the tree," though there are a hundred others — I like to think of the thousands of women and girls and children to whom I may be saying:

"In your heart of hearts you really want a garden.
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You can have one. You can make it yourself. Anyone can have a garden — if it is only two yards wide. I say this because I know. If you can only love a large garden then you will need money, gardeners, hotbeds and cold frames and greenhouses, but if your heart longs only for a garden and you are willing to plan for it, care for it, love it, you can have one.”

I have always felt on reading gardening books and articles in gardening magazines that I learned the most from the woman who said, “I planted this flower in this way,” or, “I planned the colors in this corner to produce this effect,” or, “This flower was beautiful but did not bloom long enough to be worth the trouble and money it cost.”

When I read this I knew I had learned something from actual experience, though it was not my own, but the experience of another person.

It is as a result of this that when I say, “You can have a garden if you want one,” I can only go on to tell you a very few practical things I have found out myself in making gardens for myself and in superintending various incompetent but expensive people I was obliged to call in to do the work I was too busy or not well enough to do.

I should always have preferred to have been at least two strong men in one and to have done all the work with my own hands.

I love it all. I love to dig. I love to kneel down on the grass at the edge of a flower bed and pull out the weeds fiercely and throw them into a heap by my side. I love to fight with those who can spring up again almost in a night and taunt me. I tear them up by the roots again and again, and when at last after many days, perhaps, it seems as if I had beaten them for a time at least, I go away feeling like an army with banners.

I really try to keep my rule that I will not allow myself to hate anything on earth, but I am afraid
that I absolutely know what hate is when I come upon a dozen flaunting ragweeds which while my back was turned have sprung up in a bed of lovely, tender, colored snapdragons, trying to pretend that they are only part of their foliage.

Then, while I take them out by the roots — carefully, lest I disturb a lovely young snapdragon — it is necessary for me to control evil impulses which I should prefer to believe did not lurk in the depths of an apparently mild nature.

Pusley is worse. It is more sneaking and creeping, and I do believe more rapid. I prefer not to speak of pusley.

When I say that I love all the work in the garden I am not discriminating. One of the loveliest dreams of my life is my memory of a softly rainy spring in Kent when I spent nearly three weeks kneeling on a small rubber mat on the grass edge of a heavenly old herbaceous border bed, which a big young gardener was trenching and remaking, while I followed him and tucked softly into the rich sweet damp mold the plants which were to bloom in loveliness for me in the summer.

The rain was not constant. It only softly drizzled in a sort of mist on my red frieze garden cloak and hood.

The bed was on one side of what was called The Long Walk. At the back of it was an ancient buttressed brick wall hidden by ivy and espalier fruit trees with their branches trained to lie flat against the old bricks. On the other side, behind me, was a high clipped laurel hedge where nests were being built. Beyond that were spreading velvet lawns embracing flower beds and great trees.

And day after day I knelt on the grass edge and tucked my plants into the dark rich mellow English earth. And oh, the scent of it! And the gray soft mist floating about one! And the fluting of birds in
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the wide boughed trees, and the little cries and darting
by of wings which sometimes seemed almost to touch
one's cheek as they passed! How could they be for-
gotten?

One useful discovery I have made in years of plan-
ing and watching flower beds. And I have only
reached my decisions concerning it during the last few
years.

It is a realization of the value of some very simple
and old-fashioned flowers which used to be so common
that you have known them all your lives, and so have
your grandmothers, and have regarded them with a
certain disdain as mere country cousins scarcely worth
planting.

People are always overpraising and overestimating
my garden. They insist that it is wonderful — which
it is not at all. When they enter it they cry out, "Oh,
what a beautiful garden; I never saw such flowers! I
never saw such a garden!"

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And they will not believe me when I say, "My dears,
it is all camouflage. There are no rare flowers in it at
all. It is filled with the most ordinary things you can
buy in fifteen and twenty cent packages.

"But it looks beautiful because it is full of flowers.
And it is full because I will have them, and I plant big
groups of them together, and I use a great deal of white
in masses because it throws up and makes more bril-
liant any color it is near. And I will not give room to
things which have a brief blooming, because I cannot
afford the time. This garden must look as if it were
full of color until the end of November and later — by
the grace of God."

And then I tell them what the faithful things are
which I have discovered will bloom for me all the sum-
er and all the autumn and until frost comes, some
wonders even defying frosts, if they are not too severe.

Of course the people I am speaking of are not expert
gardeners or they would know more than I do. There

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are, I find, about four expert and two passionate gardeners in a million people. All the million "like flowers," but most of them do not know the simplest by name. So I explain to them how common in variety most of my loveliest and most decorative masses of color are.

"The flowers they are made of used to be in farm-house back gardens. Most of them at that time were of ugly magenta reds and pinks. They were the old-fashioned petunias and stiff zinnias which were almost invariably of hideous flaring colors. Expert hybridizing has developed their size and given us new varieties with all the old farmyard hardiness, but of exquisite tints and shades.

"That bed at the side of the wall which looks like a fairy heap of pink rose petals is nothing but a bed of Rosy Morn petunias. The heap of snow you see behind the roses is Snowball petunia, which is soft and double and pure white. The border of this little formal
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garden is made of single whites mixed with Purple Queen.

"That tropical splendid mass of orange surrounded by tall ferny green is nothing more than a planting of Orange King African marigold put among things which are ceasing to bloom. Those magnificent tall flames of scarlet and yellow and crimson which you may think are dahlias are the great new zinnias which are many of them quite as large as any ordinary dahlia bloom."

I give them a hundred proofs that the flowers are neither rare nor marvelous, but still because of its masses of bloom they always go away saying, "The garden is wonderful!"

I do not mean to say that I have spent no money on my garden and that it contains nothing but petunias and zinnias and marigolds. That would be misleading. It is only a little garden of three acres. It is on a pretty bay on Long Island, which makes it look much larger than it is.

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I have planted a great many shrubs in it and enclosed it with trees and high trimmed hedges. I have also a great many roses and divers other things, but I am really writing this to assure those who see the practical side of things that if I had not found out by experience the modern beauty of color, the floriferous abundance and the lasting faithful blooming of mere petunias, zinnias, marigolds and single hardy chrysanthemums, there would be many times during the seasons when the kind people who overpraise my garden would come into it to find bare places instead of masses of rose and pink and white and velvet purple and flame, and they would not always cry out to me, "The garden is wonderful!"

Moreover, if I had a bit of ground at the front of a farmhouse or cottage on a country road — or anywhere — if I wanted a garden there I should get a flower catalogue or so and look up the colors of annuals which are bounteous enough to go on blooming and blooming all
through the summer and autumn, and I should make my bit of ground soft and rich and black, and dream about my colors while I was working, and plant seeds and take care of them until the miracle happened at its appointed time and I could sit upon my porch and watch waving snow white and rose and violet velvet and peach pink, and wonder and plan the next spring's planting.

It is true. I have seen it. That is why I say if you want a garden you can have it.

And as long as you have a garden you have a future, and as long as you have a future you are alive.