

A Commonplace Garden

"The best fertilizer is the gardener's shadow." ~Anonymous

"Garden: One of a vast number of free outdoor restaurants operated by charity-minded amateurs in an effort to provide healthful, balanced meals for insects, birds and animals."

~Henry Beard and Roy McKie

Most plants are pimps and thugs. Because they can't walk, flowers will do anything, no matter how lethal, extreme, or bizarre, to get other life-forms to perform sex for them.

~Diane Ackerman

"Gardening is a labour full of tranquility and satisfaction; natural and instructive, and as such contributes to the most serious contemplation, experience, health and longevity."

~John Evelyn, 1666

"I know many elderly gardeners but the majority are young at heart. Gardening simply does not allow one to be mentally old, because too many hopes and dreams are yet to be realized. The one absolute of gardeners is faith. Regardless of how bad past gardens have been, every gardener believes that next year's will be better. It is easy to age when there is nothing to believe in, nothing to hope for, gardeners, however, simply refuse to grow up." ~Allan Armitage

"All gardens are a form of autobiography." ~Robert Dash

"To forget how to dig the earth and to tend the soil is to forget ourselves." ~Mahatma Gandhi

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Moonflowers

Tonight at dusk we linger by the fence
around the garden, watching the wound husks
of moonflowers unclench themselves slowly,
almost too slow for us to see their moving—
you notice only when you look away
and back, until the bloom decides,
or seems to decide, the tease is over,
and throws its petals backward like a sail
in wind, a suddenness about this as though
it screams, almost the way a newborn screams
at pain and want and cold, and I still hear
that cry in the shout across the garden
to say another flower is about to break.
I go to where my daughter stands, flowers
strung along the vine like Christmas lights,
one not yet lit. We praise the world by making
others see what we see. So now she points and feels
what must be pride when the bloom unlocks itself
from itself. And then she turns to look at me.

~James Davis May

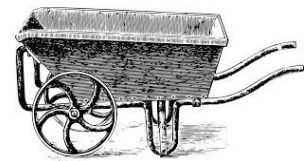
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*Gardens are never natural. They are always fussed over, designed, detailed
and planned to within an inch of their lives. Every keen gardener
is an obsessive, dreaming their gardens in the middle of the night,
and straining after a perfection that nothing else can provide
and which mostly eludes them." ~Monty Don*

The Garden Quarto

*A garden is a grand teacher.
It teaches patience and careful watchfulness;
it teaches industry and thrift;
above all it teaches entire trust.*

~Gertrude Jekyll



Spring 2021

Letter to a Friend in May

Late April when the snow finally melted, not
in a flood but a gradual retreat, a letting go

revealing the hurt earth underneath, the mud
and the hostas, fragile shoots for now. Finally

warm enough today to transplant the seedlings,
nasturtiums and zinnias, give them a taste

of what life will be like outside. Hands in
the dirt, I thought of your brother and mine

and how in the midst of all these beginnings, someone
somewhere is always ending. The cycle

of life, mesh of gears and speed, grinding
on. I know time heals what wounds us, but try

to tell me in January that winter will end.
That under a foot of snow a seed can grow.

~Sarah Freligh

From her chapbook *We*

Creamed Corn Chilaquiles Ethanol Explosives

The Popul Vuh, the epic mythology of the Quiche Maya, recounts how the gods tried three times to make human beings and failed: They made them from mud, but the rains destroyed them; they made them from wood, but they were too stiff; they made them from flesh, but they were too easily corrupted.

Finally, they made them from corn and declared them perfect.

~Tamra Andrews, Nectar and Ambrosia:

An Encyclopedia of Food in World Mythology

I.

In parts of Mexico it was custom to bury
the umbilical cord of every female

child in the hearth of the home,
under the grinding stone. It would tie her

to her fate: the grinding of corn,
maize, into meal. Summer

after summer, my grandmother
cut kernels from cobs still warm

from the sun. Scraping cream
she worked for hours, dismantling bushels.

She had known she was made
from corn all her life.

II.

Corn is monoecious:
pistils and stamens

produced in different flowers
on the same sprout—each plant

at once father and mother.

The two parents are held separately,

the arms of corn stretched wide
to keep the sexes at a distance.

Our lives sprang up as the product
of an absent father, fertilized by sperm that flew

in on the wind. I was born,
kicking and screaming, at the beginning

of optimal corn-planting season.
Though I entered this world far

from the fields of Iowa,
my grandfather heard the news

as he was fueling up his tractor,
oiling the discs on his plow,

the soil just warm enough to welcome
sleeping seeds. Scientists agree

corn and teosinte—closest relative,
genus *Zea*—share a predecessor

with a distinct split from other grasses,
but there is a gap in the branches.

No fossils have ever been found
to prove this lost ancestor's existence.

~Gwendolyn Ann Hill

Rootbound

In April, in the nursery, the impatiens
stood erect, its buds like baby kisses
pursed against her liver-spotted hands,
with promises even spring couldn't be held to,
which, being old, she ignored. Even so,
she took it home and waited for last frost.

Now, in May, she is too tired for digging
and kneeling down on her brittle bones,
but the plant wilts with the least sun, to shame her.
Like a dry sponge in a pail, its rootball
soaks up water, all the while fisting
and tightening in the orange walls of the pot.

Behind her the house squats on its foundation,
fat with chests of doilies and embroidered
antimacassars, starched, pressed, and folded.
Lately it has unnerved her how, year by year,
the photographs of her smiling grandchildren
propagate, effacing the floral wallpaper.

She spreads her knees apart and leans down
tapping the pot lightly with a trowel. The rootball
comes out whole and round like an infant's head,
all the soil converted to white threads,
and only the beads of vermiculite left
to show there was ever anything but root.

She rolls the tough mass between her palms.
*The tiny chains of her mother's necklaces
have clumped in the box into a single knot of silver,
which she massages between her small fingers
till the strands untangle and hang from her hands,
lightly coiling onto the velvet lining.*

No, this is the ground they are sinking into,
dark and cool. They rest there, weightless as gauze.
*The lacy veil spread out on the old brown
counterpane, like a web, and the seed pearls
Mother fastened on, one by one. Sweet!*
She is down on her knees, digging like a dog.

When her fingers press the earth around the stem,
she feels herself lift ever so slightly,
and for that one moment the ache in her knees is gone.
It seems that all of her life has led up to that.
She waters and waters, and the bruised tendrils
moan and stretch themselves like Solomon's wives
opening to receive his dark embraces.

~Jeanne Emmons

From her collection of poems *Rootbound*



Growing Apples

There is big excitement in C block today.
On the window sill,
in a plastic ice cream cup
a little plant is growing.
This is all the men want to talk about:
how an apple seed germinated
in a crack of damp concrete;
how they tore open tea bags
to collect the leaves, leached them
in water, then laid the sprout onto the bed
made of Lipton. How this finger of spring
dug one delicate root down

into the dark fannings and now
two small sleeves of green
are pushing out from the emerging tip.
The men are tipsy with this miracle.
Each morning, one by one,
they go to the window and check
the progress of the struggling plant.
All through the day they return
to stand over the seedling
and whisper.

~Nancy Miller Gomez

From her chapbook *Punishment* (2018)