

Angels and Roses

A magical garden, like The Garden of Eden. There were sections full of tropical plants and another full of desert plants, one with orchards full of fruit, one full of vegetables sprouting from the ground, and my personal favorite: the roses. There were red, pink, purple, orange, neon, and yellow roses. Some of them overarched on pillars, and others looked like trees; the garden must have contained every species of plant that ever existed. I don't know how she managed to pull it off. It must have taken her years to grow and gather everything. It was a miracle.

There was a giant tree with fruit in the middle of all the sections. I studied it curiously; it was beautiful. I felt blessed seeing it. It was so big the branches extended to all the areas of the garden and its perimeter almost like a dome, letting light through. I traced its branches with my eyes, looking at the fruit and flowers. I walked up to the tree and reached up to touch the fruit.

"Don't pick it," said the voice of the lady who came sternly behind me. I turned around and faced her.

"No, Ma'am. I was only going to touch it. I just wanted to know what fruit it was." I said, inching back. The lady was stern and had an angry aura, but something was calming about her.

"Well, you're not going to figure it out." she paused, "I've tried." I walked toward her carefully, keeping my eyes on the tree. She put a bag of dirt on the ground next to a cactus.

"What do you mean? Didn't you plant it?" I looked at her, and she gave me a stink eye.

"No, I didn't; it just grew there one day and grew fast. It basically grew overnight." She looked down and put the dirt around a little tomato by her feet. "Grew when I got the final plant in."

"The final plant?"

"The final plant. It was a Joshua Tree, the only species I was missing." She looked at the tomatoes on the plant and lightly squeezed them to check the ripeness, and dropped it.

I was right, she had collected a plant of every species, and then that tree had grown. The Tree was the most beautiful thing in the garden, at the epicenter of everything, sheltering and encapsulating the whole garden like a cocoon.

"Have you ever tried picking the fruit? Does it taste citrusy?" I looked at her curiously and then at the round red fruit.

"You really think if I don't even want you to touch it, that I picked it and ate it?" She looked at me with cold eyes.

"Well, why not? Aren't you curious?" I said, risking another malicious stare from the lady.

"I would rather not risk it being poisonous. I've never seen a fruit like this, and if I do get poisoned, there probably isn't a cure." she glared at me. "Think before you do, girl."

I decided to walk away from the lady's glares and returned to the roses. I sat in the middle of all the bushes. The bushes formed a bubble overflowing with flowers, encapsulating the different smells of the roses in one area. I reached out and touched an orange flower that seemed to be reaching out towards me. I smelled it and then let it go back to its resting position. I

lay on the ground enjoying the sun. “I knew you would be here.” I looked up to see the lady carrying a wheelbarrow of fertilizer and dragging a hose behind her. On her white belt, you could see her pruning tools. “This is my favorite section too. It smells great here.” I sat up to look at her. “I saw the angel here.”

I looked at her confused, “Angel?”

“Yeah. He appeared in the roses and told me to take good care of the garden.” I looked at her, concerned. This lady must have been crazy, an angel in the roses? “I’m not crazy. He was the one who told me not to touch the tree.”

“He told you?”

“Yes. Then when I came out of the roses, that’s when I first noticed that something new was growing in the middle of the garden.” She took out her shears and picked a white climbing rose and a green one. “It’s better to leave the tree alone, especially when something like that happens. You are the first one besides me to be in the garden since that tree started growing.” I watched as she plucked off the rose’s thorns and wove the vines together. She then wrapped the vines around her bun. The roses looked pretty on her. They both complimented her complexion perfectly. She looked at me, inspecting me, and then reached for the same rose that I had been interested in just a couple of minutes ago. The orange rose was big and full. It was only half open, and it was already the size of my palm. She did the same with the rose and then tied it around my hair, pulling my hair back from my face. She turned and smiled at me for the first time. Her smile was lovely, and I could see wrinkles forming; I could tell she used to smile a lot. “You should go home. You can come back tomorrow. I’m glad I have someone to help me around here. You can start in the orchard tomorrow.”

I hauled a wheelbarrow of fertilizer toward the orange and apple trees. I spread it all over the ground and pat it into the dirt. I grabbed a basket that was nearby and carefully picked the ripe apples. When I finished, I carried the basket of apples on my hip and walked toward the garden’s exit, past The Tree. Day after day, I would pass the tree while doing my duties, and every time I would have to resist the urge to go and pick the fruit. I started noticing that the fruit from it seemed to never spoil. Instead, it would fall to the ground, staring at me, begging me to pick it up. I wasn’t allowed to water The Tree. Anything that it needed was taken care of by the lady. My duties were to take care of the orchards, the desert area, the vegetables, and the roses. The lady and I traded days taking care of the roses, and she took care of the tropical plants, the mountain plants, all the underwater plants, and of course, The Tree.

I always felt as if someone was watching me whenever I was in the garden, but I never felt threatened. It was a peaceful place. Every day I would go to the roses, and I would pick one and wrap it around my hair with the lady’s permission. I considered asking her if I could take a bouquet home, but I figured they wouldn’t look as beautiful outside the garden and away from the plants that grew them. The flower from my hair would always disappear by the time I

finished my duties, and only the entangled stem would remain. I assumed the flower fell off while I was working, but whenever I looked for them, they vanished without a trace.

“Girl!” the lady called out. I saw her struggling to carry a bag of soil.

“Yes?”

“Come help.” I rushed over to the lady and lifted half the bag, together we carried it to The Tree, “Help me spread it around the tree.” We opened the bag and spread it around in a circle. While I was working on the opposite side of The Tree, fruit fell from the branches and rolled right in front of me. I looked at it curiously, and the round fruit seemed to glimmer with the sun. I couldn’t take my eyes off of it. It was mesmerizing, pulling me into a trance I couldn’t get out of, reaching for the fruit with my left hand. “Quite entrancing, isn’t it.” the lady’s voice stopped my hand cold a few inches away from the fruit. “Tell me next time something falls, and try to fight it.” she looked at me with a blank face, picked up the fruit, and then left.

I continued to do my tasks as the day went on, and as my last task of the day, I went into the rose section. Every time I was among the roses, my mood would brighten. I was reaching for a rose from the usual orange bush I got my rose from when I felt a pull on my arm. I looked around, but no one was there, and then I felt another tug on my shoulder. I turned around, ready to see the lady, but no one was there again. I looked up, and I saw a red rose hanging above me. I couldn’t see the origin of the rose’s stem, so I plucked it and removed the thorns. I wrapped the stem around my wrist with the blooming rose. It seemed to bloom to fit my wrist, and I went on trimming and pruning the overgrown rose bushes.

The rose was still on my wrist at the end of the day, and I took it home. I admired its beauty; it seemed to overflow with it, and when winter came, and the rose had not died, I took it back to the garden to ask the lady why it was still alive and thriving.

“Where did you get it from?” she asked, raising her tone.

“It was hanging over my head a couple of months ago, and I picked it. I couldn’t see what bush it came from.” she grabbed the flower from my hand and looked around in the bushes.

“I don’t have a rose like this.” She looked up at The Tree and ran towards its base. Once there, she touched the trunk and closed her eyes, and the tree seemed to shake in response, sending an identical rose flying down to the ground. She picked it up and compared the two roses with her eyebrows raised. I started trembling, and I couldn’t stop as much as I tried; it was the fear of what it could all mean. Why would this tree grow a rose if it only grew tiny white flowers that blossomed into peculiar fruit? “I guess it belongs to you now,” she handed me the flower and walked away.

I stood there staring at her stride away without a care in the world. I still felt confused; she didn’t respond to my questions. I had more questions now than I did before. As a response, I ran after her, “But what does it mean?”

“Whatever you want it to.” She dismissed me.

“That doesn’t make any sense!”

“Doesn’t it?” she sighed, then turned around, “Think about it. The Tree created a whole new type of rose just for you. Think of it as a peace offering. The Tree must like you.”

I froze in place as the lady walked off and away from my line of sight. If The Tree liked me, what could it mean? Do trees even have feelings? For all I had seen, it was very special, there were no others like it, and it seemed to have unique qualities. Creating a new rose, peculiar fruit found nowhere else grew from it, and it seemed to smell like balance. The smell of balance and serenity. The fact it was always in bloom didn’t faze me because it seemed even the out-of-season plants were consistently producing fruitful rewards in this garden.

Nothing in the garden could surprise me anymore. I soon fell victim to a lack of amazement because everything peculiar about the place seemed to become normal. I worked years and years in the garden alongside the lady; she learned to trust me and leave me alone with The Tree without worry.

She came in and handed me the keys to the gate, and closed my hands around them. I looked into her pale brown eyes and gray hair, and she smiled. “You’ll be taking over this place from now on. I’ll be coming around now and then to check up on you. I put this place together, it’s like my heart, and I’m trusting you to take care of it.” She tucked one of The Tree’s roses behind my head with trembling fingers. Speechless, I watched her walk out the gate, and I sat at the bottom of The Tree, looking at the Eden that the lady had created for herself. I hadn’t even noticed the fruit that had fallen from The Tree’s branches and rolled next to me until I started to get up. I picked it up and shook the dust off the outside. In a mesmerized state, I took a bite of the fruit and experienced pure ecstasy; I savored every bite until I realized what I had done, and dread filled my whole body. I fell to my knees and started crying. What I saw when I opened my eyes after I had eaten the fruit was horrifying.