

THE GARDEN

T HERE was no one there. The sound of feet and no one there. The gravel stopped making its noise when she stood still. When the last foot came down all the flowers stood still.

Pretty pretty flowers. Standing quite still, going on being how they were when no one was there. No one knew how they were when they stood still. They had never seen them like this, standing quiet all together in this little piece.

They were here all the time, happy and good when no one was here. They knew she was happy and good. Feeling shy because they knew it. They all put their arms round her without touching her. Quickly. And went back, sitting in the sun for her to look at.

She could see the different smells going up into the sunshine. The sunshine smelt of the flowers.

The bees had not noticed her. They were too busy. Zmm. Talking about the different colours coming out at the tops of the stalks. Keeping on making dark places in the air as they crossed the path. Some standing on their hind legs just as they were choosing which flower.

Some of the flowers seemed not so nice. As she looked at them they quickly said they loved her and were nice.

A little flower looking out from several all alike. Being different. A deep Sunday colour. Too deep. The sun did not like it so much. The sun liked the blue and pink best. This piece of garden was the blue and pink and all their many leaves. Poor leaves. Perhaps they wanted to be flowers . . .

Wherever she looked she could see this one different flower, growing taller. It was Nelly on a stalk. She went nearer to see if it would move away. It stood still, very tall. Its stalk was thin. She put her face down towards it to keep it down. It had a deep smell. She touched it with her nose to smell more. It kissed her gently, looking small. A tiny plate, cut into points all round the edge. Perhaps now it would go away.

'Dear little flower.'

It knew all about the other part of the garden. The bent-over body of Minter. The little thrown marrow had hit him. He had not minded. Old Minter alone with the Ghost.

The smell of the dark pointed trees in the shrubbery. Raindrops outside the window falling down in front of the dark pointed trees. The snowman alone on the lawn, after tea, with a sad slanted face.

Shiny apples on the trees on Sunday with pink on one side.

The slippery swing seat, scrubby ropes, tight. Tummy falling out, coming back again high in the air . . .

The apples were near this part. In the sun. Where the cowslip balls hung in a row on the string.

It was safe out here with the flowers. Nothing could come here, on the path between the two sides coming down at their edges in little blues sitting along the path with small patted leaves. All making a sound. They liked to bulge out over the warm yellow gravel, like a mess.

Far away down the path where it was different It could come. It could not get here. The flowers kept it away. It was always in other parts of the garden. Between the rows of peas. Always sounding in the empty part at the end.

Outside the garden it was dark and cold. Spring-heeled Jack jumped suddenly over the hedges. The old woman with the basket, watching up the drive. Perhaps the flowers would always keep them away now.

Perhaps if she went back now the flowers would follow her. She turned right round and ran. They did not come. Panting came at once. The big path by the lawn ached with going so fast. In front were the pointed trees sitting on the piece of lawn that came out and made the path narrow. Just round the corner, soon, just past the bit of the house that had no window, was the stable and the back porch. Coming. There they were. There were a few little flowers by the back porch, cook's flowers, not able to get away into the garden. Not able to go inside the kitchen. They were always frightened. They made the panting worse.

Bang. The hard gravel holding a pain against her nose. Someone calling. She lay still hoping her nose would be bleeding to make them sorry. Here was crying again. Coming up out of her body, into her face,

hot, twisting it up, lifting it away from the gravel to let out the noise. Someone would come, not knowing about the flowers; the pretty, pretty flowers. The flowers were unkind, staying too far off to tell them how happy and good she was.