

Grandmother's Garden

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(Fiction)

There are stories of magical places in our world that capture the imaginations of those who are lucky enough to end up there. Whether it be secret passageways to waterfalls or cliffs as high as the clouds, humans will always be attracted to the unusual and magnificent. It could take a lifetime for someone to travel to one of these destinations but Irene, who was no more than seven years old, had already experienced one of these places.

Visits to her grandmother's house were her favorite. On Friday afternoons her parents made the seemingly long forty-five-minute drive through rural country, and the whole way there Irene would watch eagerly out the window, seeing if she could guess how many minutes were left in their trip. Spending the entire weekend at grandmother's was the best thing ever in Irene's mind. She made a list in her pocket notebook of all the things they could do in the time she was there: drawing pictures, climbing trees, baking one of their favorite recipes, and maybe even boating on the lake nearby.

But the best part of visiting grandmother's house was her enormous, blooming garden. Although Irene was only a little girl and hadn't seen much of the world, she always exclaimed that her grandmother's garden was the most beautiful place on earth.

Her grandmother lived simply in a small cottage off a small dirt road. As the family car pulled up along the white picket fence, Irene admired the stonework of the house and the trees that appeared to line up along the sides. Flower boxes hung from every window and vines of ivy crept down the walls. In the doorway stood her grandmother, waiting to greet them.

Irene hastily gathered her few belongings, threw open the door, and raced up the stone path toward the house. She let out a happy cry as she tumbled into her grandmother, who laughed at her granddaughter's excitement.

"Irene, it is so good to see you! Welcome back," her grandmother said as Irene smiled from ear to ear.

"I've missed you so much, grandma. We're going to have the best weekend ever!" said Irene, jumping up and down with joy.

Her grandmother nodded and smiled, looking up to see Irene's parents waving from the car before driving away. They both waved as her parents disappeared around the corner and soon they entered the house and put down the little girl's things.

Irene immediately jumped into her list of activities, rambling off all the things she wrote down. Midway through, her grandmother gently stopped her and took the little girl's hands in hers, smiling. "I thought I would show you something first. We can do all of those later, but I think it's time I show you something."

Irene looked thoughtfully at her grandmother and nodded, allowing her to lead the way. They walked hand-in-hand through the small interior of the house and approached the back door. Her grandmother led her outside into the warm sunlight and they stopped to look.

To say that grandmother's garden was beautiful would be an understatement. There must have been about a hundred different species of plants, ranging from sunflowers to irises to milkweed, even some small trees. Everything was efficiently planted in sections stretching across the yard with stone statues and even a fountain scattered throughout. Pillars almost ten feet tall stood at the corners of the sections with ivy and vines of flowers cascading over the tops. Birds could be heard singing their sweet songs while butterflies, hummingbirds, and bees happily flew from flower to flower to get the nutrition they needed. A little stone path, like the one out front, weaved its way through the lush greenery and led up to a gazebo at the far end of the yard.

The entire thing stretched out over an acre and brought with it that magical feeling of being in an entirely different world.

"It's as beautiful as I remembered," Irene said softly as if not to disturb the peaceful air around them.

Her grandmother smiled and gestured for them to walk further. As they walked slowly through the garden, Irene gazed at the extraordinary nature around them. It was spring so all the flowers were freshly blooming and she could smell the pollen in the air. Bees buzzed past her head and she thought about how soft they would be if she held one in her hand. She stooped down at one point to brush her fingers against a lamb's ear plant and examined the various insect species crawling on the ground.

"Do you know why I brought you out here, Irene?" her grandmother asked as they approached the gazebo, looking dreamily around the garden.

The little girl thought about it for a little while, knowing that her grandmother had taken her through the garden a dozen times. She eventually shook her head, suddenly eager to know what the special occasion was.

Her grandmother let out a soft sigh and made her way into the gazebo, taking a seat on a bench. Irene followed suit and waited patiently for her grandmother to continue, looking out into the garden with admiration.

“There is so much that goes into this garden. Do you ever think about that? The sunlight, the rain, all the pollinators. They make everything go around, and not just in this garden but all over the world. The amount of beauty nature gives us is one of the most generous things if you think about it. Imagine not having all of this. You might not enjoy coming here anymore.” The old woman chuckled to herself, sighing again.

“I know you are young, Irene, and you have much to learn and many years in your life to come, but I always want you to remember this garden. Look around and take it all in. There’s so much here that you may not see years from now which is troublesome to think about, but it’s little girls like you who have the world in your hands. I am older and when you age you begin to see what has happened in your life and what could have been done differently. I don’t want to scare you but I will stress that it is so, so important to take care of the earth. All that you see here is because of the earth and you must take care of it.” Her grandmother looked off into the distant trees, pausing for a moment.

“If we do not take care of the earth, the earth will not be able to take care of us.”

Irene repeated this phrase in her head multiple times, slowly nodding her head.

“I will grandma, don’t worry,” Irene said and took her grandmother’s hand.

The old woman looked down at their hands and smiled, then looked up at her granddaughter.

“Alright,” she said, “Now let’s go finish that list!”