

# The Deserted Garden

by [Elizabeth Barrett Browning](#)

I MIND me in the days departed,  
How often underneath the sun  
With childish bounds I used to run  
To a garden long deserted.

The beds and walks were vanish'd quite; 5  
And wheresoe'er had struck the spade,  
The greenest grasses Nature laid,  
To sanctify her right.

I call'd the place my wilderness,  
For no one enter'd there but I.  
10  
The sheep look'd in, the grass to espy,  
And pass'd it ne'ertheless.

The trees were interwoven wild,  
And spread their boughs enough about  
To keep both sheep and shepherd out, 15  
But not a happy child.

Adventurous joy it was for me!  
I crept beneath the boughs, and found  
A circle smooth of mossy ground  
Beneath a poplar-tree.  
20

Old garden rose-trees hedged it in,  
Bedropt with roses waxen-white,  
Well satisfied with dew and light,  
And careless to be seen.

Long years ago, it might befall, 25  
When all the garden flowers were trim,  
The grave old gardener prided him  
On these the most of all.

Some Lady, stately overmuch,  
Here moving with a silken noise, 30  
Has blush'd beside them at the voice  
That liken'd her to such.

Or these, to make a diadem,  
She often may have pluck'd and twined;  
Half-smiling as it came to mind, 35  
That few would look at them.

O, little thought that Lady proud,  
A child would watch her fair white rose,  
When buried lay her whiter brows,  
And silk was changed for shroud!<sup>a</sup> 40

Nor thought that gardener (full of scorns  
For men unlearn'd and simple phrase)  
A child would bring it all its praise,  
By creeping through the thorns!

To me upon my low moss seat, 45  
Though never a dream the roses sent  
Of science or love's compliment,  
I ween they smelt as sweet.

It did not move my grief to see  
The trace of human step departed: 50  
Because the garden was deserted,  
The blither place for me!

Friends, blame me not! a narrow ken  
Hath childhood 'twixt the sun and sward:  
We draw the moral afterward<sup>a</sup> 55  
We feel the gladness then.

And gladdest hours for me did glide  
In silence at the rose-tree wall:  
A thrush made gladness musical  
Upon the other side.  
60

Nor he nor I did e'er incline  
To peck or pluck the blossoms white:<sup>a</sup>  
How should I know but that they might  
Lead lives as glad as mine?

To make my hermit-home complete, 65  
I brought clear water from the spring  
Praised in its own low murmuring,  
And cresses glossy wet.

And so, I thought, my likeness grew  
(Without the melancholy tale) 70  
To 'gentle hermit of the dale,'  
And Angelina too.

For oft I read within my nook  
Such minstrel stories; till the breeze  
Made sounds poetic in the trees, 75  
And then I shut the book.

If I shut this wherein I write,  
I hear no more the wind athwart  
Those trees, nor feel that childish heart  
Delighting in delight.  
80

My childhood from my life is parted,  
My footstep from the moss which drew  
Its fairy circle round: anew  
The garden is deserted.

Another thrush may there rehearse 85  
The madrigals which sweetest are;  
No more for me! i<sup>a</sup> myself afar  
Do sing a sadder verse.

Ah me! ah me! when erst I lay  
In that child's-nest so greenly wrought, 90  
I laugh'd unto myself and thought,  
'The time will pass away.  
,

And still I laugh'd, and did not fear  
But that, whene'er was pass'd away  
The childish time, some happier play 95  
My womanhood would cheer.

I knew the time would pass away;  
And yet, beside the rose-tree wall,  
Dear God, how seldom, if at all,  
Did I look up to pray! 100

The time is past: and now that grows  
The cypress high among the trees,  
And I behold white sepulchres  
As well as the white rose, i<sup>a</sup>

When wiser, meeker thoughts are given, 105  
And I have learnt to lift my face,  
Reminded how earth's greenest place  
The colour draws from heaven, i<sup>a</sup>

It something saith for earthly pain,  
But more for heavenly promise free, 110  
That I who was, would shrink to be

That happy child again.

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