

Kathy's Garden:

AT ONE WITH THE GARDEN

A lover's eyes see more clearly than those of more sober & rational souls. No, don't give me the old saw about love being blind. Shakespeare may have written it; it doesn't mean it's true. Lovers see all the seeming flaws of their beloved quite vividly, & find them, if not charming, at least part of the entire charming picture.

I think about vision & love when I have visitors to my little Piercy cabin & the garden near it. Visitors are not always gardeners; indeed gardeners are rare. Even gardeners can, distressingly, rush cooing to the one plant you were thinking of digging up and throwing away, whilst they trample the bed fritillaries. For gardeners who love rare & peculiar plants life can be lonely; so few folks even speak the language, let alone recognize that that little tuft near the daises is not a weed but a rare treasure from Turkestan.

My garden is not really a haven for exotica. If I gently murmur Latin to my plants it is more because it is a language of love than because I have no one else to understand it. But, I come to realize, probably only you appreciate your own garden with all the passion & pain it deserves.

Walking through my shady garden with an old friend who has been a devoted, seeing gardener for years, I realized that I see my garden in all tenses at once; all a visitor sees is the current moment. My visitor saw the clematis, not yet in full bloom, the roses struggling and flourishing ones alike, & the lilies, yellow & coral, burnt orange & burgundy. She saw, also, a great deal of shade & suggested cutting one of the madrones.

Did I flinch? Probably. It was as if a sweet & well meaning friend had casually said, "your beloved is a bit tall, isn't he? Have you considered cutting off his legs?" Yes, the madrone shades the roses. But the woodruff snuggles so sweetly at its roots, & the rufous towhees sit there in the early

morning. In spring the madrone rains down dozens of honey scented bell shaped flowers that my daughter & I string into "pearl" necklaces. In autumn the wood doves come for the bright berries.

No, love isn't very rational. But it does bring joy. These early summer mornings I often wake at first light &, slipping into my clothes, quietly rush to my meadow garden. There, while my family sleeps snugly on at home, I have the lover's prerogative of complete, uninterrupted communion. My reading glasses perched on my nose. I read the plants. The tomatoes are setting fruit amongst their starry yellow blossoms. Their stems are covered with delicate hairs that remind me of the golden fuzz on my infant's heads. The little herb plants sit in their corners, taking up a few inches of space where in a year or two they will sprawl to the path. The sweet peas are still in bloom in a kaleidoscope of color.

I do a lot of physical work in those early morning hours, hauling buckets of compost, gathering stones to finish the paths, watering the still vulnerable new seedlings. It is labor that calms my soul.

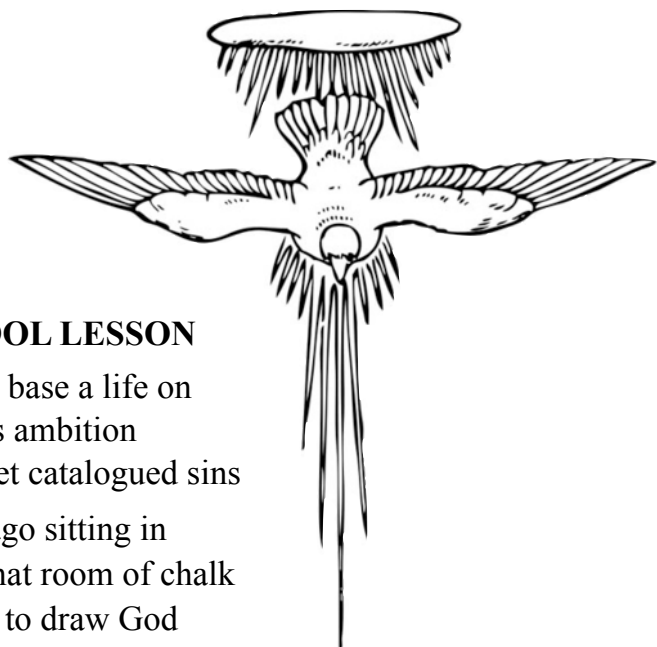
The true delight of those early mornings however, the reason I run to my meadow as if to the waiting arms of a lover, is that in that solitude I am free to see my garden completely & with all my heart. Do you dare look completely at your lover's face in a crowded room. I can't. So it is with gardens. I share them, most the time, freely with my children & friends. But in the early morning they are mine, or I theirs, completely. If I sit for an hour simply immersed in wonder I am strengthened by it.

This morning as I knelt by the inch high sunflowers, marveling at their perfect leaves, I saw a flicker of movement. It was a moth, coral and gold and black, emerging into the sunlight.



I watched while the wet & crumpled wings unfolded, pulsed, & grew strong. The little moth climbed to my fingers & clung there. In the face of such complete newness and beauty I sat perfectly still. Gardens contain the most unexpected treasures.

-Kathy Epling



SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

Lust is nothing to base a life on
but then neither is ambition
or any of the sweet catalogued sins
we learned long ago sitting in
straight rows in that room of chalk
& lemon. I tried to draw God
out of wintergreen & silver
paper. That's not right. Again.
Black & white held its own, a sure
point where cross pieces met
Pressing gummed angels, fishes stars
to my tongue, to skin, to paper. Don't forget
Birds fly away. Come back. We changed
our faces, partners, names. God wore
cloud sandals, eyes of the latest love.
What I do know, still know, turns
like beads through gaining hands:
trees, deserts, bushes that burn.
Touch me again. Here. Psalm to psalm.
sheets wear thin as we turn
the better to burn.

--Kathy Epling

WHAT I MIGHT FORGET TO TELL YOU

The way to the spring passes
the wild strawberries & that
corner of pale orchids
Also the tall stalked lilies
the deer eat, carefully
biting the closed buds
There is a sweetness
under the flowers of thyme
the bees know
your tongue can find it out
The open heart chooses
its own journey
Grief has slammed
many doors the leaves open
bit by bit, imperceptibly
by April gathering the lost
home again out of the ground
of our longing, out of the sweet air
The birds speak
their many languages
all of them known
to the wind touching your hair
When I walked between
the new leaves & that last
bright turn to the earth's dark
I loved you, I loved you dearly

-Kathy Epling

