



Gardens in Stories

by Marilyn Loser

2015 November 4

It's time to put the garden bed; but I've previously written about that subject (take a look at the News tab at AlamosaFlowers.net). Since daylight is getting shorter and the days will get colder, my mind turns to staying cozy and reading about gardens. So many books with the word garden in their title aren't about flower gardens at all, but some use the garden motif to explore human life.

Probably one of the best known books about a fictional garden is Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic, "The Secret Garden" (1910). An unhappy, young orphan named Mary Lennox rediscovers a forgotten garden in her uncle's gloomy Yorkshire, England estate. She meets a sickly, small boy and through restoring the garden the children become healthy.

Until I was researching information for this column, I had never read Virginia Woolf's short story "Kew Gardens" widely published in a 1921 collection. It gives glimpses of four groups of people as they pass by a flowerbed in the famous Kew Gardens in London. Wikipedia states, "Finally the focus pulls out beyond the gardens, contrasting the murmur of the city with the voices and colour of the gardens." I found it free online by searching for it at ebooks.adelaide.edu.au.

Another older story I enjoyed is "The Enchanted April" by Elizabeth von Arnim (1922). According to Penguin's UK blog, "This is the tale of four women escaping from rainy England to Italy and a garden paradise beside the sea – so bursting with summer colour and sunshine copies should be sold with sunglasses." The 1991 film version was shot at Castello Brown in Portofino, Italy – the location portrayed in the book. You can download a free text or Kindle version of the book from gutenberg.org. In case you're not familiar with Project Gutenberg, it offers more than 50,000 free ebooks!

Of course, not all fictional gardens are in England. A bestseller, "Garden Spells", by Sarah Addison Allen (2008) is set in North Carolina. While I did enjoy this book, it's not my favorite genre since it deals with an apple tree imbued with magical powers.

"Where Lilacs Still Bloom: A Novel" by Jane Kirkpatrick (2012) is on my wish list. It is based on the life of Hulda Klager who was a German immigrant. She settled in Woodland, Washington, and began hybridizing lilacs in 1905. After her death, the gardens were preserved and are now a nonprofit botanical garden specializing in lilacs and it is open to the public. Since lilacs do so well in Alamosa, I'd like to learn more about her and the 250 lilac varieties she developed. Today, the gardens contain more than 90 varieties of lilacs. I thought I was doing well with four varieties in my garden!

"Tales as Tall as a Sunflower" by Stephen Butterman (2009) is also on my wish list. Not a work of fiction, it depicts his experiences in his Ohio garden. According to Amazon.com, "His home spun down to earth look at the world in combination with his knowledge of both gardening and politics, combine to create one very fun and amazing book, perfect for an afternoon read, even if you don't have a garden."

And, of course, there are cozy gardening mysteries. I've enjoyed Susan Wittig Albert's China Bayles herbal mystery series which features an ex-attorney who lives between Austin and San Antonio, Texas. Years ago I read the Cadfael Chronicles written by Ellis Peters and love those that were filmed with Derek Jacobi as Cadfael. He's a 12th century herbalist monk living in Shrewsbury, England.

I've just learned about Anthony Eglin's English garden mystery series in which a British professor of botany is the main sleuth. I'll check it out this cozy winter!

Do you have a favorite gardening story, book or film? Let me know at Marilyn@AlamosaFlowers.net.

"The sun blazed on scarlet geraniums, bushes of them, and nasturtiums in great heaps, and marigolds so brilliant that they seemed to be burning, and red and pink snapdragons, all outdoing each other in bright, fierce colour." Elizabeth von Arnim in "The Enchanted April"