

The Merritt Garden

by Zakiah Miaris

The residence

The droplets ran down the window.

As he peered through the tear-stained glass, the Clarke family ascended into the light of the full moon.

“Good riddance,” he sighed.

Nothing was more relieving than the backside of a vehicle to Edgar. He had seen it three times over. First, the Thompson people who could not bear the stench of the rotting fruit. Second, the Bennett family who had never been able to keep a pet due to their odd disappearances. Now the Clarke brood because of a spook the children had had in the Merritt. Everyone who dared enter always seemed to leave. But Edgar was always around to tend the Merritt. Many gardeners had belonged to the house. Edgar, however, was the only human that dared to stay.

As one would assume, there was a reason for the excessive amount of staff departures. The previous gardeners had worked for no longer than two months before putting in their letters of resignation. You could reason that the garden was a lost cause. No one wanted to begin to maintain it. Edgar had started regardless of the stigma-filled greenhouse.

A circle

At 3 am sharp the vehicle was destined for the Merritt. Down each road, the sleeping houses mocked the 3-am worker, but the wheels rolled on regardless of their taunts. The motion lessened and finally to a stop, a few minutes wait and then a turn into the pried metal gates. The green of the grass was as dull as an old light, and the fountain occupying the front was infested with the thick moss and the intimacy of vines. He stepped onto the gravel and shoved his woven hat onto his troubled head.

What is a Merritt?

The Merritt garden was quite large and even larger without the confines of vines. The main sections of the garden are the greenhouse, the maze, and the rather large pond and fountain. Nothing grew particularly well in the Merritt but the plant life was dense. Fruit trees grew in several areas of the residence.

“The fruit porous with rot, yet so compelling to squash with only the carcass left to decompose in the depths of the earth”, murmured Edgar as he trod on the corpse of a long gone plum.

He was quite proud of the collection; apples, plums and oranges alike. The Thompsons had attempted to plant a flower patch in the greenhouse but luck was not on their side, but the deceitful dirt swallowed the flowers whole. The patch was now inhabited by black mondo grass and bat orchids. Treading the mud-covered lawn, he ventured past the thick hedges; the reflective house lay amongst them. Fog filled his eyes; the plants engulfed him as he faded into the darkness. Night came and not a whisper was heard. Dew set on the water-desperate plants. The gargoyles waited patiently for the rising sun, after which they would wait some more. The fountains ran dry through the thick of the moonlight. Vines reached out to anything living, souls screeching for air, waiting in the anticipation of release. Lovers, likewise, always have a hold on you even after strangling the life out of you.

Edgar would not be mocking the apple trees the next day or any day after.

Katherine

Three years had passed since Edgar's disappearance.

A new family had moved in next door: a very tightly-knit group. Their youngest Katherine took quite a liking to the Merritt after wandering into the midst of the maze by chance.

That same night she snuck out, past her older siblings and parents who were talking about the latest disappearance

Little Katherine was oblivious of the topic. She continued out to the terrace where she had set up a line of escape and slid down it, running towards the neighbouring house. The weather had just turned cold and with her frostbit hands she pushed through the heavy boundary, her hair becoming a mop almost immediately. It did not dampen her excitement; not one bit.

As the fruit trees started to come into view, she heard a faint whisper.

As compelling as it was she continued to the hedges, with the noise becoming nothing more than a faint muffle.

Puzzle(d)

The hedges became a blur. Nothing seemed right.

The voice was clear now.

She tried to escape but the hedges had definitely moved - "hello? Is anyone there?" - fear filled her, but her delicate voice was nowhere to be found.

They heard her.

The escape

Footsteps rushed through the maze that frightful night. A parade was invited to accompany her but she moved with anguish....

“Tranquillity” Edgar hummed,

“Ah yes, silence would be her assumed peace”, the woman sighed.

Everything went inaudible, her steps slowed and she was faced with herself. The most bright reflection cast back on her. The faint whisper returned, she noticed the door open, and as her feet took her around the garden she noticed how grotesque the plants became with age. The voice hummed some more and she followed it all the way to a single orchid, it was violet, she was reminded of her grandma who had since passed.

“Come closer dear,” the woman breathed.

Katherine skipped over to the sound not before tripping, laying in front of her in the dirt was a pair of lips submerged within the earth. There were cracks threatening to bleed within the angel's bow, she subconsciously thought of getting them some water. Her face neared the colourless lips, she could feel the tickle of air brush her cheeks. She leaned in listening to the lips when she felt the hot flush of air grasp her lope, the dirt grazed her cheek and then threatened her eyes. By the time she struggled against the force only the bottom of a night gown and slippers were known to witnesses.

This was not the beginning nor the end of the Merritt. Thousands lay beneath the earth pleading to be released from the grasp of their past mistakes.

The wash of the rain cleared all evidence of human activity.

The garden continued to grow.

A new family arrived.