

Short story

Mother Earth - Tiffany Dumas

The residents of Bloom-Ville Town called it “Gaia’s Garden”, though no one in the town had any recollection of who Gaia was. The garden was located right behind the white picket fence, in the middle of town, fenced with the rusted gate made of something that looked like it might have been perfect steel and diamonds a very long time ago. The fence somehow seemed godly, as if it depicted something that was ancient in origin. The blush roses and the white tulips were always in bloom, scattered across the waterlogged soil. They were always perfect; no season could touch them. They stretched across the veranda, giving life to what could be dead. The flowers were beautiful, perfect – but something about them seemed ancient. Strange. Asleep. Yet awake – alive. Ready, waiting.

No one watered these flowers. No one turned the soil, no pruning, no tending to. Yet the flowers stood tall, vibrant, disconcertingly alive – ancient, but somehow sleeping at its core, beneath the ground.

Old Mrs. Bloom was the first to notice the shift. She lived in the house across the flower sanctuary and always sat on the porch, reading old Stephen King novels. White hair and a freckled face, clear blue eyes that pierced right through to your soul when she looked at you. No one could lie to Mrs. Bloom and face that gaze of transparent ocean blue; she had been married to her old, senile husband – who had a predisposition for trickery and deceit, much too long. They never had any children – Mrs. Bloom’s reproductive organs would not permit them to do so. Endometriosis, the doctor said. The lesions were like cancer in a way; they sucked away at your will to live while simultaneously begging you to stay alive – to endure. To survive. It’s that survival instinct everyone keeps talking about; the one old man Darwin wrote about. You know, the one where you have to keep fighting no matter how hard it gets, or how much pain you have to endure. Because we all have to get to the other side: for at the other side of pain we shall be rewarded. That’s what the grown-ups always said, and we obeyed. One day, she swore that the flowers had turned their gaze upon her, as if they were watching. “You’re reading too much

Stephen King, dear”, said her husband of fifty-six years. “The horror must be making you senile”. He cackled loudly with his toothless grin. Her heart sunk slightly in horror as she turned her head back in repose and shifted her focus back to her book. “I know what I saw”, she said under her breath as her husband wheeled his way back inside the house. Those were the last words she ever muttered to herself.

But when Old Mrs. Bloom disappeared two days later, the whole town started talking. She hadn’t left a note of any kind – no warning, no signs of distress. All that was left of her was the fear she unknowingly left behind, and the people who would continue looking for her, and much to their dismay – never find her.

Gregory was walking his dog on the sidewalk when it started to bark, running across the street towards Gaia’s garden. It was then that he spotted the wild tendrils in its sinister threadlike structure wrapped around what looked like an arm protruding from the wet soil, flexing and curling with their serpentine bodies like a shadow in motion – probing, hungry, relentless. The lifeless body, blindly reaching for the surface, eyes alarmingly open through death had appeared to have gazed upon something it should never have seen. The body belonged to Old Mrs. Bloom. Then the tendrils began to spread. At first, a few flower petals could be seen scattered on the sidewalk, creating a banquet beautiful enough to stop and admire. But then, one morning after mass, Father Clive observed the hordes of tendrils spreading across the church steps. He swore to God that he could see them move, hear them whisper “mother”. The tendrils along with the petals led straight to the dais, and as he followed them, he prayed under his breath.

Gregory was a forty-year-old retired veteran who now dedicated his life to books and understood that the writing process required a level of commitment and determination to the craft that would make ordinary people gasp for air. He also understood that you were required to have certain nerves of steel accompanied by a moderate amount of ghosts that would never leave you. It was the night before yesterday when he’d decided that he needed to experience the death of nature in order to make his story come to life. The following night, Gregory made his way to Gaia’s Garden. Flashlight in hand and accompanied by a shotgun, he wandered with wearied determination across the ancient garden. His dog had gone missing, and he swore he had seen

him wandering towards the ancient looking iron gates just this morning. Those iron gates always made him think of faeries for some reason. Not the pretty, tiny winged, enchanting kinds of faeries who wore little Tinker-bell dresses and made dreams come true – but the wicked kind, the kinds who stole and kidnapped lovers, who prided themselves in trickery and mischief, the kind who appeared beautiful, but hid themselves among nature’s elements in order to deceive people and cause chaos. He wandered alone down the line of iron gates, walking steadily along the tendrils and bushes of flowers, he realized how ominous this all felt. He felt like he was being watched by something greater and bigger than he was. Something old. It was reminiscent of a graveyard, but somehow more colourful, and watchful. It was an eerie feeling, but he could not explain it: it felt as if he had been called to the Earth.

When he failed to find his dog, he returned home, eyes wide and trembling in fear and knowing. When his wife reported him missing the next day, the town went searching for him. He was found buried in Gaia’s Garden on June, 25, tendrils around his neck. “They’re growing”, said Mrs Palmer, the town’s nosey old gossip who could not keep her nose out from underneath other people’s armpits. “And they’re taking”, she sighed.

Now the flowers began to creep past the old iron gate, stretching toward Bloom-Ville as if they were gaunt shaped fingers stretching, reaching out to take back what was theirs. The people of the town locked their doors and shut their windows tight. But every morning, the tendrils, flowers; tulips, roses, carnations, drew closer to the outskirts of town – beyond the threshold of what was considered their habitation for so long. They extended their reach towards the porches as they snaked themselves around door-knobs and intruded the front yards of the town’s inhabitants where they bloomed in places that had only ever been debris and unfertile soil. The tendrils slithered along the ground in a sentient, purposeful way, twisting, inching closer to the surface like slick, pulsing veins, relishing the air for prey – its shadow determined to choke out whatever light there was left above the ground.

The Old flower garden was Alive, but not in the way that you thought it would be – the carnations bled a thick, inky sap that dripped into the tousled roots below the earth, nourishing the earth with something rotten. Vines coiled around the surface of the earth like fingers grasping

and winding themselves around tussled trellises like barbed wire awaiting thoughtless flesh. It is in this very place that a sickeningly sweet scent began to clog the air enough for the residents of Bloom-Ville to choke on. The petals of flowers begin to twitch and writhe as if in response to a beckoning Mother. The heat was oppressive, but they never wilted - and somewhere among the coiling vines, an archaic whisper rustles through the leaves like the wind – but no wind stirs them. In the midst of all this, the sun casts an eerie glow, turning the lilies a spectral white, while the daisies transform themselves into a bruised shade of insipid yellow – while beneath the flowers, the soil grows soft – soft enough to receive life. And death.

The inhabitants of Bloom-Ville no longer spoke about the people who went missing anymore. They only waited. Waited until the next flowers would bloom and spread their invasion. But the inhabitants of Bloom-Ville knew; once the flowers bloomed for you, its tendrils seeps through the soil of your being – and takes you.

Somewhere in the natural night, past the murmuring shrubberies, the whispering leaves and the sinister creak of the old iron gates swinging shut in the cold wind, something ancient was sleeping but beginning to stir beneath the rocky, Motherly earth. And although the earth was sleeping amongst the murmurs of the elements, you could hear something else – the organic, yet alien and sinister liveliness of the tendrils encroaching the dead of night, awaiting the end and the beginning – the beginning of something new.