



## ✿ The Ruined Garden ✿

*Lynne Hardy*

‘They are gone with the moons of ancient Earth.’

The travellers espy a walled garden, ruined by time and weather. It lies not far from the road to somewhere else and is a safe haven for the traveller in the wilderness. Within the garden are the remains of a tower and a fountain. Although the tower is lacking a roof and has collapsed above the second floor, it makes a passable shelter, provided you do not mind the birds that roost in the fallen rafters. The fountain is ornate and very old. The water ran dry long ages past and the carving is weathered and faded, although it once must have been an object of rare beauty.

The only other thing of note in the garden is a rose bush. It is ancient and gnarled, but each summer it flowers as if it were a young and vigorous plant. The blossoms are of the subtlest pinks, fading from deep centres to pale tips and the perfume is heady and bewitching. Many of the perfumers of Kaiin would kill if necessary to imitate its haunting fragrance<sup>1</sup>, but mysteriously its existence has remained virtually unknown.

Should anyone pick a blossom from the rose, they will begin to feel drowsy. They will fall into a deep slumber on the grass beneath the bush unable to reach the shelter of the tower. No magic can wake them and there is no water with which to douse and rouse them! The despoiler will experience an amazing dream, so rich and vivid in detail that it will seem as if they are awake. The garden is whole again, the tower restored and the fountain sparkles in the warm orange sunlight. A man and woman are seated at the fountain's edge and appear to be talking, first joyously and then in earnest. A dark cloud passes over the sun and the woman vanishes. The man, once young but suddenly aged, turns to the sleeper and presses something into their hand, muttering the single word “REMEMBER”. At this point, the sleeper will awaken. In their hand is a small, golden ring of beautiful craftsmanship. Inside is an inscription:

*To Apanai, with all my heart. M*

The ring is quite real and also quite valuable as it is immensely old. Anyone researching the history of the garden as a result of this dream should be able to find out about its haunting (but only after a struggle; the dwellers in the villages round and about don't want to discourage travellers from staying in the tower as it keeps them out of the village and prevents them from causing trouble where decent people live). Many people have seen the ghost of the man pacing the gardens or the tower, inconsolable with grief, but rarely has anyone plucked a flower and seen the entire vision. Those that did attempted to forget the entire experience. The flowers will fade the instant they are removed from the garden, becoming translucent shadows of their former glory without scent or colour.

1. Although to be fair many of the Perfumers of Kaiin would kill for a small pouch of terces, or even, if their victim was a rival perfumer, for no charge at all.

There is only so much of the story left to memory: a young man lived in the tower and courted a young lady of the town in the time before the sun darkened. In need of a fortune to support his love, he travelled abroad and was lost for many years. Stories of his unfortunate demise soon reached the tower and the ear of his lady. She cared for his garden, hoping all the while that he would come home, but eventually she pined away for her lost love and the garden fell into disrepair. He eventually did return unharmed and was grief stricken that he was too late to comfort and save her. He fled the garden, never to return, cursing his folly and wishing for a chance to redeem himself. It was not long before he too crossed the veil and at this point the visions began to appear to travellers.

The dream will continue to haunt the sleeper until they either give the ring away or do something about the situation. They could journey back to the relevant aeon and ensure that the mysterious “M” does not vanish without trace (which might have been their fault all along ), or they could locate the grave of his love and finally give her the ring he intended to marry her with. It would be fitting that the lady Aysanai is buried beneath the rosebush, close to but never with the ghost of her paramour.

Should the situation be remedied, by whatever means at the party’s disposal, there could be many ramifications for their own time. After all, should they reunite the lovers while they still live, then the tower and garden may very well be inhabited when they return! They’re going to have some explaining to do ...

