

A Simple Example of the Importance
of Recognising the Power of Flora Within a Garden

by Rosalyn St. Pierre

I leave the garden. I sense hostility from the flowers and shrubs entangled in weeds, from the hedge in need of trimming and the lawn smothered beneath fallen leaves. A foul miasma rises into the morning sun.

A curse upon my day?

I turn towards the town. The streets glimmer in the early-morning sunshine. Traffic, confined by its own excessive numbers, moves sedately. A false sense of calm.

I am deceived.

I study my reflection in the shop windows: a slight woman standing upright, carrying an elegant walking stick with an ornate silver handle. I run a hand down my new leather jacket—tough, motorbike quality, with a reinforced collar. My woollen cap is not designed for the elderly. Jaunty—that’s the word. It hides my greying hair.

That’s my secret.

I use the moment to observe those passing by. Two schoolgirls walk past, their uniform skirts ending just below knicker length. I assume they are wearing knickers. I notice that my maidens are being pursued by two lads.

“See that jacket?”

His pal looks at me.

“Cool,” he mutters.

My day is made.

Be cautious. An attack is possible. Remember the code.

At that moment, I experience a rare shiver of nerves. But I had volunteered—before the disturbing observation:

“No one would suspect a woman of your age and appearance of being sent to collect the package.”

We all know the internet is like a transparent waterway, where every fish and every minibeast lurking among the weeds and detritus of the muddy depths can be identified and instantly destroyed. Post is solid but unreliable, and collection points are too vulnerable.

That leaves the ever-devilish human: a species both hunter and prey, skilled in deception, pursuit and disguise—perfectly equipped to deliver and collect.

I approach the café designated for the handover. Pseudo-Indian music seeps through the doorway. Sadly, this is not to be a Miss Marple experience. No tea and iced buns here.

Strangely, those might have been my final thoughts as the ground rushed up to meet me and the words “Die, bitch!” were spat into my ear.

Not a hit—a fall. My foot is caught in a pothole. My training produces at least one successful outcome. I swing my stick. A scream. A body falls beside me. School uniform. Not a local tie, and the face is too old even for the sixth form. Cold grey eyes. Long blonde hair. Overall, a mess.

“Oh, fuck!” I scream.

Are those to be my last words before death?

Silence.

Still alive.

I contemplate the stones into which my nose is pressed. I feel the agony of my knees, now lodged in a geological depression. I see people’s feet and hear voices asking:

“Are you all right, dear?”

A surge of anger.

Who are they calling dear?

I am aware of my assailant getting up, moaning and moving out of sight. Offers of help receive the ungrateful response:

“Piss off! Leave me alone!”

The kindness of strangers.

My limbs reluctantly obey instructions to move. My intact glasses are replaced, although I predict unsightly bruises will soon appear on my face.

I sit.

My two young lads crouch beside me.

“Did you hear what she just said—and at her age?”

The other asks, “Did she tear that jacket?”

A command cuts through the crowd.

“Stand back. I’m a medic!”

Now, that is a surprise.

A good-looking man, about six feet tall, crouches beside me. Lovely hazel eyes. I am momentarily hypnotised. Shorts and walking boots. A hiker? He swings a rucksack from his muscular shoulders. Inside is enough medical equipment to perform an amputation.

“Nothing broken. Can I take you into the café? You can sit down and have a cup of tea.”

Of course. Successful diagnosis and immediate treatment. Who needs A&E?

As he helps me into a chair, his hand brushes my collar and extracts a small hypodermic needle. A nasty little weapon, primed and ready to fire. I realise my tough leather jacket was a far better purchase than I had planned. I begin to shake. Had she been about to plunge it into me? Was he another one of Them?

“Well,” he muses, “who would have thought it? You!”

He raises a hand and ruffles his lovely, thick hair. My stick is within reach, capable of inflicting serious damage. Or I could deliver a sharp slap. Or perhaps lean over and gently push back the lock of hair that has fallen across his eyes. Or take the hand that so tenderly wiped my cuts.

“We haven’t been introduced,” I begin, reciting the banal code words. “I’m Jayne, newly arrived in this lovely town.”

A lie, of course. I have lived here for more than twenty years.

“I’m looking for a present for my granddaughter.”

“And I really am the Medic. Never thought that rucksack would actually be used!”

Laughing, he passes me the Package: a microchip buried inside a bumper box of Elastoplast.

A taxi home. A strong gin and tonic. Now, standing in the garden at night, I sense forgiveness. A bargain. I will start on the weeds.

This is another world—strange, yet usually friendly and familiar. Never frightening, provided the rules are obeyed.