

Raising Maidens of Virtue

A Study of Feminine Loveliness for Mothers and Daughters

By Stacy McDonald

Excerpt

1. THE FENCE DWELLERS

Dear Lord, keep my face turned toward You always. Do not let me covet the habits and fashions of the world, but give me the strength to turn my back on that which would distract me from Your beauty and goodness. Lead me in the way that I should go and do not let me turn away from your path, nor wink at compromise. Amen

Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long. For surely there is an end; and thine expectation shall not be cut off. (Proverbs 23:17-18)

Once upon a time, a kind and wise Gardener created a beautiful garden—a sanctuary of splendor with lush, deep green foliage and rich, colorful flowers of every shape, scent, and size. A lovely trellis spanned a cobblestone path, filled with dreamy-scented roses of the softest texture and deepest hues.

Along the quaint path were fragrant herbs, carefully chosen and planted so they would work and grow well together, all with different textures and shapes. Some had long, soft, feathery leaves; others were full and spiky; a few were bushy and short. Nonetheless, each one had its own unique beauty and purpose in his garden, and the sight and scent of the choreographed blend made it a treasure to visit and brought great joy and satisfaction to the Gardener.

Next to the beautiful garden was a rock quarry, gray and cold. The flowers by the fence nearest the quarry began to turn their faces down toward the rocks on the other side and wonder what it would be like to be strong and smooth.

It was true that rocks had no roots, but the flowers did not really care about roots. Who could see those? It would be much nicer to be big and strong so everyone could behold their powerful shape.

As they gazed upon the gray lifeless rocks, the flowers began to covet the rocks' strength and coolness. They grew discontent with their purpose and design and began to despise the beautiful colors and delicate leaves and petals with which they were adorned. No longer were they satisfied with their own simple beauty. The wayward flowers rejected their delicate leaves and vibrant colors and instead wished to be made of stone—desiring only the strength, weight, and power of the granite. These errant flowers became known as the Fence Dwellers.

The Fence Dwellers began to rip off their beautiful petals and leaves and refused to produce seed. After all, the rocks did not produce seed, so why should they sacrifice in such a selfless manner? The Fence Dwellers covered themselves in clay in order to hide their vibrant colors. Soon they began to crouch low to the ground, trying desperately to resemble the rocks they so deeply admired.

As the older herbs, ivies, and bushes that lived farther inside the garden began to notice the strange behavior of the flowers, they laughed. How foolish the flowers looked: barren of petals, covered in clay, attempting to be something they were not.

But soon, the new seedlings within the garden began to listen to the stories of the Fence Dwellers. And as they grew, they too tore their own delicate petals and dusted themselves with clay—halfway up their stems; they were not yet as daring as the Fence Dwellers who were tempted daily with the sight of the

rocks.

The young plants desperately wished they could uproot and live next to the quarry like the Fence Dwellers so they too could see the magnificent boulders and witness the impressive strength of stone.

Something about the boldness of the Fence Dwellers and the stories they told the younger plants of the garden caused a strange spirit of yearning throughout the yard . . . and things began to change.

Within a short period of time, the vibrant color and stunning beauty of the garden were covered in mire. Instead of the sweet perfume of lavender, rosemary, lemon verbena, and blooming flowers, the stench of decay prevailed. The birds looked elsewhere for a home. They were not interested in sheltering their young in a place void of greenery and lacking in beauty. The bees, butterflies, and other insects and wildlife found little nourishment here any more and visited the garden less and less often.

Surprisingly, the Fence Dwellers did not realize they were shriveled and dying. Their bald heads were stripped of petals, and the clay was suffocating their stems—yet they still yearned to be something they were never intended to be. They were blinded by their own vain desires and remained with their faces toward the quarry—turned forever from the Gardener (Proverbs 28:14).

The Gardener walked sadly through his creation and sighed. He noticed the tender plants with clay halfway up their stems and missing petals—the result of a self-imposed deed. He shook his head in dismay.

“Why have you covered yourselves in clay and removed your petals?” cried the Gardener. “I have created you in the way of my choosing—for my own purpose. But you have rejected my ways and set your eyes upon foreigners and have adorned yourself in mud and grime. You have ravaged and exposed your own bodies.

“Do you not know that you belong to me? This was a wicked and foolish deed. You have emulated the Fence Dwellers and have followed after those preferring death. They have chosen cold and hard barrenness over the true beauty of a warm and tender life-giving existence. Do not attempt to mimic those of the quarry or their followers—those who never belonged to me. There you will find only death and desolation.”

The plants of the garden shivered and hid their faces; however, the Fence Dwellers did not hear the words of the Gardener, for they were no more. The plants who belonged to the Gardener solemnly watched as the last remnant of the Fence Dwellers’ decomposing stems blew quietly over the fence to rest upon a large boulder. Here the scorching sun would finish the job of destruction until nothing remained.

Fret not thyself because of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked; For there shall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked shall be put out. (Proverbs 24:19-20)

Joy in the Morning

The Gardener turned to his creation tenderly. Silently a raindrop landed on the fragile leaf of a basil plant. Three more brushed the buds of a rosebush. Soon a torrent of raindrops poured from the sky, cleansing and refreshing the filthy clay-covered plants. The dandelions wept with joy as the lovers of self repented and turned to the Gardener forevermore. Fresh blossoms opened and the scent of life and beauty filled the air.

The Gardener held out his arms, threw back his head, and laughed a deep, hearty laugh. He was overjoyed with the display of color and renewed health that he had granted his creation. After the rain subsided, the Gardener rested in the shade and summoned the birds to come sing in the branches of a nearby pear tree. Soon more birds followed to nest in the profusion of greenery and scented blossoms. Bursting with life, the young flowers called to the bees to come share their nectar, and the butterflies

joined them.

From that day forward, the plants rejoiced in who they were and did not desire to be anything other than what they were called to be. Their only desire and purpose was to please the Gardener and cause him joy forever.

Share Your Heart

Who were the Fence Dwellers? What did they have in common with many young people of the world today?

Why were the Fence Dwellers uninterested in whether or not they had roots? How is this similar to someone who is unconcerned over the state of her own soul?

Discuss why the Fence Dwellers may not have been interested in producing seed (Exodus 1:7, Psalm 128:3-4).

How did the discontentment of the Fence Dwellers affect the younger plants and flowers of the garden?

Have you ever been affected in a similar manner by those who were not seeking God?

Why do you think the younger plants only “tore” their petals slightly and covered themselves in clay “halfway” while the Fence Dwellers “ripped off” their petals and leaves, and completely “covered” themselves in clay?

Mothers, do you see any areas where your young maiden dabbles in forbidden activities “halfway” (music, clothes, rules, moral choices)? If so, discuss the possible effects of this behavior by considering the overall appearance and condition of the garden.

How does this story remind you of the way modern Christians sometimes try to emulate the world? Do you see yourself in this story at all? Discuss with your mother ways you can keep your face turned to the “Gardener” instead of the “quarry.”

Read Romans 12:1-2. Discuss what “reasonable service” means and what it means to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.

Read and discuss the following Scriptures:

Psalm 37:1-6

Matthew 6:24

1 John 2:15-17

Romans 1:21

Romans 8:5-8

1 Peter 1:14

Ephesians 5:7-11

Revelation 18:4-5

Excerpted from Chapter One of Raising Maidens of Virtue: A Study of Feminine Loveliness for Mothers and Daughters by Stacy McDonald

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