

The Gardener's Dream · *Ai Qing*

There are several hundred roses in the garden, so that the gardener can see roses all year long. His friends throughout the country know that roses are his pride, and they send him all sorts of roses whenever they can. As a result, the roses in the garden are of every variety. In full blossom, the roses, all of the same form but colored variously, give the garden a flourishing vitality. Yet it's a little monotonous. To keep the roses healthy, he has to work pretty hard. Each day he has to water and fertilize them, loosen the soil, trim the branches.

One night he dreams: He is trimming the withered twigs from his roses when he sees many flowers entering his garden. It seems to him that every kind of flower in the world has come there. The flowers look at him sadly, with tears in their eyes. He stands up, startled, and looks among them.

The peony is the first to speak: "Out of regard for my dignity I want to say I have no intention of intruding on your garden. I come because my sisters asked me to be with them."

Next the water lily speaks: "As I woke in the lake by the woods, I heard my sisters walking among the trees and talking loudly. And so I followed them."

Inclining her slender form, the ipomoea asks: "Aren't we beautiful?"

The pomegranate is angry. From within her reddish flame, she says: "Your indifference shows contempt for us."

The catalpa blossom says: "You must learn to appreciate the beauty of the personality."

The cactus says: "A man comes to love the mild and obedient when he himself is weak. We are all strong-willed."

The yellow jasmine: "I have brought with me faith."

The orchid: "I value friendship above all."

Each having expressed herself, the flowers say in unison: "To be understood is a kind of happiness."

The roses speak last: "We're desolate. If we could live together with our sisters, we would be happier."

Another of her sisters says: "To be someone's favorite is blissful, but we've been alone a long time. Behind the backs of the fortunate there is endless complaining."

Then all the plants disappear.

Waking, the gardener is depressed. He walks to and fro in the garden, thinking: "Each plant has its own will to live. Each has a right to put forth its blossoms. My prejudice has made all flowers unhappy, and it's narrowed my vision of the world day by day. Lack of comparison is confusing my mind. We see that things are long because we know of other things that are short. We can see when something is big because we know what is small. We know there is beauty because we've seen ugliness. . . . From now on, my garden will be a place for all flowers. Let me live more wisely. Let all flowers blossom according to their seasons."

Co-translated by Hualing Nieh