

SAMPLE



LADY STIRLING'S
WICKED
GARDEN

SAMPLE

First in a series.

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Excerpt from the Journals of Wilfred Stirling, 1844

November 26, 1844

Last night, unable to sleep, I snuck downstairs to get myself a cup of tea. There, in the sitting room next to the hutch with the key to the wicked garden, I heard my father mumbling to himself.

"They're just plants, aren't they?" he was asking himself. "And this land is mine, is it not? By law, by the Queen's law. This entire estate. The entire garden. It belongs to me! No matter what you, or Belladonna, or Poppy, or any of the others say. No matter what you do. No matter what you threaten me with."

There was real anger in his voice. It was almost as if he was talking to someone who was also there — but, peeking around the corner, I could not make out anyone in the room with him. There was just a wooden crate of glass jars and vials on the floor.

I saw my father raise a vial from the chest on the floor and take from it an eye-dropper. The liquid within the vial was glowing, and I watched as he dropped some of it shimmering into his eyes.

Truly frightened, I was about to leave — nervous that my harsh father would rush around the corner and spot me eavesdropping. Hector Stirling was known for his quick temper. But then, in a gentler tone, I heard him whispering: "And yet — even though I know they are mine by human law, I do have my doubts. For Belladonna keeps telling me that I belong to the earth, that the earth does not belong to me. And, when she speaks to me in this way, there is a part of me that wants it locked away forever, wants no one but me to be able to access its power."

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As I rushed back up the stairs to my bedroom, I heard my father unlock the door to the back path and growl: "No. No! I have made my decision. I will do what I want with my land, with my estate, with my garden."



Excerpt from the Journals of Wilfred Stirling, 1845

December 19, 1845

Some of the plants are quite beautiful to the eye. But, I am nervous at the way father has been experimenting with them. I followed him to the racetrack tonight. What a rough crowd he seems to have fallen in with. I witnessed him selling vials from our garden to the gangs that hung behind the bookies tent.

I worry that, between his gambling and his greed, he will drive himself to sell more and more concoctions from the garden. Is this the "business venture in the city" that he has been speaking to mother about so boastfully?

I myself cannot appreciate the beauty of the flowers. When I try to tend to them, I am afraid. I believe they can sense my hesitancy. They stand taller and stretch away from me, recoiling with their translucent bodies and curling stems. I truly think they are ~~all of a kind of what~~
~~is being~~



THE WELL OPENED, THE GARDEN GROWS



umor of the happenings at the seance at the Stirling Estate spread quickly upon Muriel's return to the university. This only increased the reputation of the weekend gatherings that the Stirlings would host—much to the joy of Roger and Delia, who for years had been starved of what Delia called “proper social entertainment.” The Bohemians and artists from the city provided the estate with just that. So, at their encouragement, Muriel brought more and more of her friends back. And her friends, many of whom did not come from the same prominent families as those in the old Stirling family's upper-class social circle, were grateful for the elegant place to stay, the good food, and the space and time to create their art.

Years later, Muriel wished that she had created a document cataloging all of the poems, paintings, and plays that had their first drafts hatched at the estate during that energetic season. Those pre-war years, when the family still had its luxury, and when Muriel had read through her grandfather's journals and was beginning to experiment with the magic in the garden. Those years when she first made her own Belladonna elixir and dropped the shimmering liquid into her eyes.

Indeed, after the seance and the reputation it earned her, Muriel felt a distinct pressure to recreate, in some small way, the intensity of that first experience. After finding and reading his journals, plus—most importantly—the booklet with all the illustrations of the plants in the garden and detailed notes on how to use them—Muriel began making trips back to the forest she loved as a child.

The wrought iron gate—with its crest depicting the labyrinth and the well surrounded by dancing fairies and elves—was somehow



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