

The Secret Garden

by Bluebird, September 2016



Robert has the walled garden next to ours. We share one wall, made of cinderblock, painted brown on each side. It's lined with terracotta pots, statuettes, shells and rocks he dug up when he moved in forty years ago. Vined and branched plants grow back and forth; it's a living wall. Robert is unwell, and both our gardens know it. The neighbors and our animals know it, and it hangs like a cloud in our sunny alcove.

Robert's paintings have been a staple of Peridot Green's rotation. They're colorful and dark, gestural and hypnotic. He was a dancer with the Bolshoi Ballet and those themes echo often. He grew up in Cleveland, feeling different from his peers but reassured by his parents, who encouraged him to pursue art in all its forms.



His apartment and garden are magical, always shifting. He covers the walls floor to ceiling with his own art, paints and refinishes the fixtures constantly. The lights are never overhead, but spread like a lichen in candles and LED strings.



Robert wrote many prose poems, memories from his youth. Reading through them today, thinking about death, and about the ghost theme we'd settled on months ago, and about the heavy planters and rocks that have strangely fallen crashing off our shared garden wall the past few nights... I found this story of a haunted house from his childhood in Cleveland:

The haunted house was at the end of the Kelso Avenue. The street at the end had a slight curve in it. My friend Joseph and I would look at it on our way to the woods through the years. It was mostly covered with ten-foot hedges that surrounded the house. We never ventured through the tall hedges. We lived only a block away. The story went that the couple who lived there married very young. After the husband died a sudden death the wife went half mad, just walked out of the house, and locked the door-never to return. Everything in the house was left at that hour; the shades were all drawn. It was a good size house, with four bedrooms, an attic and a basement. What stood out in our minds were the large, dark green hedges that circled the house in a ghostly fashion. The neighbor across the street, Mr. Ives, always trimmed the overhang of the hedges off the sidewalk. I got small jobs cutting lawns to make a few bucks here and there through the neighborhood. It meant a lot to a nine year old. A few years later I got curious and went through the hedges, where everything was dead except for the locusts. I walked around the tall weeds to the front porch, every step on the wood made an eerie crack. All the shades were drawn, and the door locked tight. On my way out, I noticed a few basement windows through the tall weeds. As I got closer, I could see they were rotted with age. I gave one a little push and I realized that with the right tool I could open it. The next day I told Joseph, and asked him if he would be interested in getting into the haunted house with me early in the morning. He agreed. I got a small crowbar and we planned to meet in his backyard at 6am, 6:00 came, but there was no Joseph. So I called him, "Joe-e-e-ey". He woke up and came downstairs and joined me in the yard. Off we went, with crowbar in hand, to the haunted house. Before we walked through the small opening of the hedges, we looked around to make sure nobody was watching us. Little did we know, across the street Mr. Ives was watching us from his dining room window; he was getting ready for work. We got the window open without much trouble. I never forgot the first look into the basement tubs, which were rotted with cloths; the stopper was never taken out. (Dali where are you-your best masterpiece is yet to be painted!) Joseph held the window for me as I lowered myself down onto the moss tubs. We slowly made our way through the dim, smelly, cobwebbed basement to the steps leading upstairs.....

....(Shit, I'm sitting here writing this in my back room with my new soundproof windows closed-and I heard a crack in the other room!) Slowly, we walked up the staircase; at the top the door was halfway open. As we peered through the opening, the room was dimly lit from the only existing light, the corners of the shades. Our hearts jumped up into our mouths. To our horror, there on the dining table what looked like a dark coffin was only two mattresses stacked one on top of the other, filled with tons of cobwebs. When the shock wore off and the room took on a less spooky feeling, we kids got to have some fun. We went into the bathroom, opened up the rusty medicine cabinet and found tubes of toothpaste; grabbing them in our hands we squeezed it everywhere...ceiling, mirror, walls. As we came out of the bathroom and into the living room we heard footsteps coming up the front porch. It was Mr. Ives, trying to peek through the cracks in the shades. He had seen us going through the tall hedges. We made a beeline for the stairs, out through the window, and ran down Kelso Avenue. He never told our parents.