

Home/Garden

Remembering a Shakespearean summer

Recently my family and I took our separate roads to Charlotte, Vt., to the great Larson family reunion. It was held on the shores of Lake Champlain where Uncle Wally, Aunt Ruth and their children built a farm. That farm is the scene of the most vivid memories of my childhood.

And, perhaps, I am the cause of some vivid memories myself.

One of my cousins looked at me, squinted his eyes and remembered a summer that I spent in Vermont when we were both 13. "You quoted Shakespeare," he said with a trace of the same irritation he probably felt all those years ago.

"I certainly did," I said wincing at the memory. It was not of any intellectual precocity that I quoted the Bard, but because of an (noxious adolescent) affection. That summer I was in love with "A Mid-Summer Night's Dream," appropriately enough, since we spent our days in our own enchanted woods and fields and swam at night in the crystal lake under a bewitching moon. We won't mention that we probably got into as much mischief as Puck and his band of prankish fairies.

I translated all my cousins into the characters of the play. Naturally, besides acting as director of our own midsummer foolishness, I was Helena, one of the two mortal heroines, and Peggy was the other, Hermia. I thought Walt and Bobby handsome and dashing, and fit to be our consorts. Ly-sander and Demetrius, Tommy and Jenny, who were very young and the blondest sprites, were destined to be the king and queen of the fairies. Oberon and Titania. I didn't go so far as to make every one memorize lines or even stage a portion of the masque, but I insisted on calling everyone by their Shakespearean names and shouting "What ho?" and "Exeunt!" a lot.

Occasionally I even quoted a real phrase. *For aught that I could ever read, / Could ever hear by tale or history, / The course of true love never did run smooth.*

Pat
Leuchtman

Between
The Rows



At thirteen I was more interested in romance and intellectual pretention than in those rude players with their own play of the most cruel death of Pyramus and Thisby. Fortunately, my tastes have changed since then, or at least expanded to appreciate Shakespeare's humor and his clear-eyed view of our mortal foibles.

Yet, I have not forgotten Oberon's song: *"I know a bank whereon the wild thyme blows, / Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows, / Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, / With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine. / There sleeps Titania sometime of the night, / Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight."*

Echoes.

When I walk in my garden now, there are echoes of those long ago summer days. This summer I planted the top of the bank in front of the house with thyme, so that when I tend the peonies and roses, I'll brush that scent into the air. It isn't Shakespeare's rose, eglantine or sweet briar that I have growing on either side of the front door, but I think he would have approved of the alba rose. Passionate Nymph's Thigh, that flowers in shades of seashell pink on Midsummer's Eve, or the May Queen that will climb around the door.

Since he was from the country, he would also have approved of the deep layer of rotted manure that I put around those roses every spring. On the slope of the bank, I've been mowing violets from

under the apple tree that shades part of the perennial border.

I've also moved some herbs, wormwood and lemon balm, that Shakespeare would have recognized, even if he didn't sing about them. The wild pansy pops up everywhere in the garden, a pretty weed that Shakespeare tells was shot by Cupid's arrow. *Before, milk-white, now purple with love's wound, / And maidens call it, love-in-idleness.*

Shakespeare's flowers

There is mention of flowers in other plays of Shakespeare. The columbine, a flower that denoted a lack of value, is mentioned in "Hamlet" and "Love's Labor's Lost." The columbine may have been common and lacking importance in Shakespeare's day, but the wild purple columbine growing by the edge of my shed has a sturdy and unassuming loveliness that pleases me as much as the more spectacular cultivated columbine in the garden with its airy spurs. This perennial is not fussy in its requirements and is very welcome when it blooms in the spring.

Cuckoo-buds, buttercups, paint my meadows with delight, along with daisies that were twined in Ophelia's garland. Marsh marigolds, mary-buds bloom in the shade by the stream feeding my pond and pinks and gillyflowers (carnations) bloom in the border.

The tents we capped in at the family reunion were far removed from Cleopatra's silken canopies, but the enchantment is not gone from the fields. I found us all just as dashing.

And there is no question that Jenny still reigns as Titania.

Our reunion revels might still have caused Puck to declare, *Lord, what fools these mortals be!* Yet there was no happier fool than I to wander the fields, to splash in the lake and to remember.



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