

LADY WITH THE PURPLE HAIR

In the shadow of a magnificent castle, sat the tiny village of Crepe. Within that little village, sat a little cottage with purple shutters and a purple roof. If it were not for the lady with the purple hair who lived there, the little cottage might have remained nondescript in the shadow of the magnificent castle. And rightly so, for the cottage drew its attention from that lady with the purple hair who kept a marvelous garden of purple flowers that almost engulfed the little cottage.

Violet, as the people in the village came to call her, had no other distinguishing features other than her sparkling eyes that reflected the world of purple around her. No one knew Violet's proper name, but it didn't matter for 'Violet' most assuredly fit. In fact, the people of the village knew little about Violet's past, but that, too, did not matter. What they did know came from their dealings with her on a daily basis as the flower lady. Though a bit on the shy side, she often spoke eloquently when talking about her flowers. If anyone outside the village ever needed flowers, they quickly learned of Violet and her thriving flower business.

Honest, kind, passionate, quick to lend a hand, giving—these embodied the person the village knew. She always said if she wasn't there to go ahead and take what you need and pay her later.

Even if you didn't need any flowers at the moment, exploring Violet's garden stood out as a treat of its own. To enter her garden, you had to open a rustic wooden gate that had a carved bouquet of roses as a centerpiece. The cobblestone path had a border of Royal Purple Liriope on the right edge with a mass of Cosmos in the center and a tall background of Butterfly Bush. The left side of the path had a border of Ageratum at the edge with a mass of Purple Coneflower in the center and a tall background of Azalea. When the path ended, it opened up into a large rectangular plot of precisely laid out squares of bedding plants. Walking the parallel paths through the plot, you would find Petunias, Pansies, Phlox, Lantana, Angelonia, Agastache, Larkspur, Salvia, and more. A giant wall of Bougainvillea served as a background and dividing line for her property. Of course, the time of the year dictated what plot provided the most gorgeous color, but there never came a day that some part of her garden didn't glow with purple.

Her favorite part of her garden consisted of roses, roses, and more roses. She spent a great deal more time pampering the purple delights growing there than other areas. You never heard the other flowers complaining, though, for they never lacked what they needed. Forming a border around the huge rose garden, most appropriately, were Violets.

Leaving the rose garden, you would come upon a winding path of all kinds of purple wildflowers. Entirely informal in nature, one could say it had a whimsical quality to it (some said the same of Violet herself). When the wildflowers ended, a mass planting of 4 different varieties of Agapanthus or Lily of the Nile surrounded a small pond that was being fed water by a large windmill, painted purple, of course. As the path wound its way back towards the front of the property, you would find a small picnic area with specimen Crape Myrtle trees that had circular plantings around them. One had Society Garlic; another one Purple Queen; another one Oyster Plants; and so on. At the center of the picnic area sat a large wooden table with wooden stools, all painted purple, of course. Next to the picnic area, Violet had

her modest greenhouse filled with magnificent orchids.

While such a wonderful garden certainly took up much of Violet's time, every day she took the time to take a cartful of her flowers up to the queen in the magnificent castle. She would sometimes be gone for hours, but she always returned with an empty cart. The queen must have been a wonderful lady. Some in the village even said she was honest, kind, passionate, quick to lend a hand, and giving—traits rarely spoken of in the regal world.

One dark September day, the people in the village received the saddest of news. Their beloved queen had passed away. The villagers naturally flocked to Violet's flower shop to buy flowers to send to the royal family, but they couldn't find Violet anywhere on the property. The people figured Violet must have gone to the castle to provide a glorious floral display for the funeral. Since she had always said to take what one needed and pay her later, that is exactly what the people did. Mourners coming out of the castle said they had never seen such marvelous floral arrangements at any royal affair.

The people of Crepe kept going back to Violet's garden to pay their bill, but still never found

her there. They did find the small wooden box by Violet's front door where she had said they could insert payments. Now most of the people of Crepe had but the income of the commoner, so Violet often let them pay as they could over time whenever they needed something from her garden. One day, Rachel Davis, when she had just dropped off her payment, saw two royal gardeners coming down the path from the castle. They stopped at Violet's house and began tending to her garden. For two months those gardeners kept Violet's garden in a condition that would have made Violet proud. The people still had Violet's garden to pick out their favorite flowers, but they missed seeing Violet and wondered when she would be back.

More sadness soon fell upon the land. War had broken out and the little village had to relinquish its young men to defend the land. The village knew, though, that the king would do everything he could to keep their sons safe. He would not send them to battle for the sake of pride and power. Unfortunately, the village suffered great economic woe from the war. Most people simply did not have any money to pay Violet, but they knew that even if Violet were there, she would never pressure them for money.

Charlene McMaster walked by Violet's house every day, and whenever she had a penny or two left, she would drop it in the box. She felt a little guilty at times that she couldn't do more, but then she got an idea. Since the war broke out, the two royal gardeners didn't come down anymore, and Violet's garden began to look kind of neglected. She got together with some of her friends, who were also feeling the same way about not being able to pay their bills. The ladies decided, if they couldn't pay money, they could pay with their time in keeping the garden in top condition. And Violet's garden continued to grow and bloom in purple majesty.

As is so often the case, the succeeding generations did not have a connection with Violet and her garden. As those who knew of Violet and what she had meant to the village of Crepe began to pass on, the importance of it all also began to pass on. The little cottage with the purple roof and the purple shutters fell into disrepair and eventually was torn down.

If you should, someday, travel the land in those parts, you will not find any trace of the little cottage with the purple roof and purple shutters, but you will see the magnificent castle still standing. If

you walk the grounds of the castle, you will find a small cemetery that contains generations of royalty. In that cemetery, still today, you will find a purple headstone surrounded by a bed of violets. As a backdrop to the headstone, there grows a massive purple flowering vine with the name of *Petrea volubilis*, or as it is more commonly called, Queen's Wreath.