

I have a rose garden, and it's my pride and joy. My blooms have won prizes at the Royal Show, and often grace our church for weddings and funerals. I take great care of my beauties, and each bush is carefully cultivated and pruned to ensure the best possible display. Oh yes, I am proud of my roses.

Then one day I found a gift on my doorstep. It came with a card which simply read, 'From a friend.' It had one of those descriptive tags attached to it:

'This rose is a must-have to grace your garden. It blooms all year round, and produces beautiful, fragrant blossoms. It is hardy, pest resistant, and requires very little maintenance.'

Now, I'm usually very fussy about my choice of plants, not entrusting that task to anyone else (and I certainly didn't know who this 'friend' was), and fragrance is not of primary importance in a rose as far as I'm concerned, but the promise of year round blooms and low maintenance was alluring. So I thought I would give it a go and see what happened. I duly planted it among the other bushes and waited.

The results were alarming. This rose was hardy all right - too hardy! It turned out to be more of a bramble rose. Its tendrils grew wild, reaching out to the bushes around it, and no amount of pruning would tame it. I would cut it back to within an inch of its life - I even took a chainsaw to it once - and within a week it had bounced back. While it's blood-red blossoms were prolific, they were small, and useless for floral displays. They did have, as the tag suggested, a lovely, powerful fragrance, but, as I said, that was of the least importance to me.

I resolved to give it another couple of months, then I would dig it out and return my garden to some sense of carefully cultivated normality.

Unfortunately, before I could carry out my plans, I became ill and had to spend several weeks in hospital.

If there's any place where you have no control, it's a hospital. I fretted and fumed for my loss of it, and worried about my rose garden, also completely out of control - *my* control. My friends knew better than to offer to look after it. They knew that I would never entrust my rose bushes to anyone - they were *my* babies, *my* prized possession. I dreaded what I would find when I finally got home again.

My fears were well founded. I returned home just after Easter. The rogue tree had gone feral, intermingling with almost every tree in the garden. But amazingly, instead of those bushes being suffocated, they seemed to be producing more abundantly than ever - beautiful, big, perfect roses - blossoms I would be proud to exhibit. The garden was such a riot of colour, and the fragrance! - the perfume was heady and as wild as the wild rose itself. And it seemed to bring healing to my battered senses. My frustration turned to reluctant admiration, then joy. This was just the place in which to recuperate.

But recuperation has been elusive. I have been told that this illness will be my last. I can no longer work on my garden to bring it to manicured perfection. But somehow it doesn't matter any more. The thorny tendrils of this wild rose, with it's blood-red blooms, have wrapped themselves around my heart, but instead of dying of it, I am blossoming in ways I never knew possible.

It seems that this rose bush that challenged my sense of order and decorum, and insisted on being resurrected despite my worst efforts, has found its way into my very being. So much so that I feel sure that I will carry its flowers into another life, enveloped by their heady, healing fragrance.

And there I look forward to exploring another, more perfect, garden.

Wild Rose



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