

The Fragrant Floribunda

by Harry Dunn
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When I was just a callow youth,
Living, single, in the city,
I shared a little two-bed flat
With my mate, Len, and an old moggie we called Kitty.
This flat was one of twenty,
It had no gardens, lawns or shrubs,
But of concrete there was plenty,
The balconies were concrete, and the parking space thereunder
So we invested in a planter-pot, the cheapest we could find
And planted a small rose in it, called a floribunda,
It was a hardy little plant, 'tho not the fragrant kind
That you can buy these days, Down-Under.

We placed that little pot-plant
At our welcoming front door,
And watered it religiously, once or twice a week,
Never less, and never more:
One day when I was watering, a Saturday, I think,
A passer-by, moved by my dedication,
Stopped and said, 'I see you're giving that lovely plant a drink,
And I am much impressed,
To see a garden-lover, like myself.'
And here she gave a little wink –
Good-humoured, and a little bit beguiling,
'We must have sim'lar karma,
And our cosmic souls in sync.
So would you care to visit me, young man –
I live a few doors up the road–
To see *my* fragrant floribunda,
While we're both in gardening mode.
Tell me what you think.'

I took a closer look, at this friendly passer-by;
She was sort of middle-aged, and well preserved,
Dressed in clothes which reeked of money,
That was the first thing I observed,
She mentioned her address, just a few doors up the road,
It was that double-storey mansion, behind the eight-foot fence,
She described it as her 'humble wee abode'
But having seen it many times I knew –

This fancy lady owned a very fancy resi-dence.

'You look like such a nice young man,
Well mannered, not vulgar, crude or risky,
So we might share a slice of Christmas cake,
And perhaps a glass or two of whisky,
And appreciate the joy and floral wonder,
Of my lovely formal garden-not forgetting
My much-loved floribunda,
And I'm sure you'll be impressed
With my famous *amaryllis*,
It's also known as Naked Lady,
Which I keep well away from summer heat and sun,
In places cool and shady.'

'We're a pair of garden-lovers,
With sim'lar appetite,
For things of grace and beauty, underneath the cover,
Just a mature-age master gardener like myself
And her willing acolyte,
And who knows what mysteries one might discover
If one allows one's wildest fancy to take flight.'

Now, some of this was lost on me,
I was rather inexperienced, for a man of twenty-one,
Just a simple Gippy boy in a large and sinful city,
And this charming lady, she was treating me as she would a long-lost son,
To refuse her invitation would seem churlish and a pity,
So, of course I said I'd love to see her private garden,
And consider it an honour;
She replied, 'There's no time like the present,
And by the way, I am Miss O'Connor.'
I put down my watering-can, to take up that kindly offer,
And the last thought on my feeble mind
Was to compromise in any way
Miss O'Connor's honour.

She walked me 'round the garden beds,
Behind the eight-foot fence,
Of course I was impressed - they covered half an acre,
The stately mansion was immense,
And she was both the owner and care-taker.

The flowers in that garden ranged from A to Zee,

She picked an Aster for herself and a Zinnia for me;
She showed me bergamot, begonia, bluebells and buttercup
Camellias and carnations, chrysanthemums and dahlias,
Daisies and delphiniums, far too many to write up;
There were foxgloves, fresas and forget-me-nots
I observed in awe and wonder,
But at this point, I'd seen no bed of roses,
Much less the promised floribunda.

There were gerberas, geraniums and gladdies by the bunch
Dame Edna would have been in Seventh Heaven,
They say she eats a bunch of gladdies with her lunch.
Miss O'Connor showed me hyacinths and holly,
Jasmine, lotus, lavender and ladies' slippers
Just large enough to fit a dolly,
I thought the marigolds looked rather small,
But her narcissus petals looked good enough to munch.

She showed me orchids, orange blossom and petunia,
Rhododendrons, snap-dragon and sunflower,
Pansies, tulips and floating water-lilies
And blushing violets, secluded in a bower.
I said 'You have a botanic tour-de-force here, Miss O'Connor,
But I'm a little bit surprised to see no *roses* in this vast array.'
She smiled and said the only rose she had was the much-loved floribunda,
It was never seen outdoors,
And couldn't stand the light of day.

Miss O'Connor invited me inside
And gave me Christmas cake and whisky,
Johnnie Walker Black it was, in glasses deep and wide,
This lady was a very friendly host,
In fact, I got the odd impression that she was friendly
To the point of being frisky.
In my innocence, I said, 'In all the horticulture I've been shown
I don't remember seeing, the two flowers that you mentioned when we spoke
Outside my small rotunda;
One of them, as I recall, your famous amaryllis,
And the other was a fancy rose - your much-loved floribunda.'
'Of course I've not forgotten, you silly, silly boy,
They're both kept safe and private, out of sight
In a room I call my pride and joy
It's down the marble hall, second on the right
And I'm going there right now,

Why don't you pour yourself another Johnnie,
Just sip it and enjoy, then come on down and join me;
There's no need for you to hurry, dear,
It wouldn't worry me at all if you decide to stay the night.'

Now, some of this was lost on me,
My ken of ageing ladies—it was zero, not just limited,
But I'd ingested several Johnny Walker Blacks,
So I ambled down the marble hallway, just a trifle tipsy
Not troubled or inhibited,
—Instead of making tracks.
I opened up that door, second on the right,
And found myself ensconced in a semi-darkened room,
I was just an innocent bush-boy, in Nineteen-Sixties Oz,
Expecting to be shown some very special bloom –
And in a way – I was.

There, lying in repose, in a state of full undress,
Was this ageing amaryllis,
Not the lovely little flower that I expected
But a very naughty lady,
Rather boney and fi-brillous;
'Come to Momma, dearie, and we'll lose ourselves in wonder.'
'Hold on,' I cried out in mortal panic, 'I have to run right now—
I can hear my mother calling, she has a voice like distant thunder.'
'I thought you said your mother lives far away, in Gippsland—
You lily-livered little toad,
And don't ever come back, begging,
From your squalid little dog-box down the road!'

I ran like hell from that double-storey mansion,
That fragrant, florid house up there on the hill,
Like a burglar caught with plunder,
And thanked my lucky stars that I'd escaped the need
To further my acquaintance –
With Miss O'Connor's much loved floribunda,
Or any other noxious weed.