The Enchanted Garden

From the Book “The Fairy Doll and Other Plays for Children” by Netta Syrett

Characters:
-Nancy
-Cynthia (her doll)
-Lubin (Shepherd)
-Amaryllis (Shepherdess)
-Six Daisies
-Cupid

Scene: An old-fashioned garden. Enter Nancy, a little girl of seven or eight. She has a doll under one arm and a book under the other. She seats herself, puts her doll in the corner of the bench, and begins to talk to it.

NANCY: Sit there, Cynthia, and talk to me. You’ve got a silly expression today—just like Jane when she pretends not to hear a word Mother says to her. And you know you do hear, perfectly well. Are you listening? (She makes the doll speak in a hurt voice.)

CYNTHIA: Yes. But don’t be cross with me!

NANCY: (Embracing her.) No, darling! Mother won’t be cross to her dear Cynthia. There! That’s right. Now you look a bright, intelligent child—like I have to look when I go to see Aunt Sophie. Now listen, Cynthia! I want to tell you something. (Impressively.) It’s a great secret. You won’t tell anyone, will you?

CYNTHIA: Mayn’t I tell Mademoiselle?

NANCY: (Shaking her violently.) Certainly not! Do try to have a little sense, child! Not anyone! And especially not Mademoiselle. Do you understand? . . . Very well! Now there’s nothing to cry about. I shan’t tell you if you cry. . . . That’s right. Now listen. (Very impressively.) I’m quite sure this is an enchanted garden?

CYNTHIA: Oh, Mother! Why?

NANCY: (With a matronly manner.) You may well ask, my child! (Relapsing into her own voice.) Because I had a lovely dream about it last night. I dreamt that all the people I want to be real people came into this garden, and were real people. . . . Now don’t pretend you don’t know what I mean, Cynthia! You know quite well! There’s the little painted boy and girl on the teapot in the drawing room cabinet, and the flower fairies in that book Uncle Jack gave me, and the statue of the dear little blind boy with the bow and arrows in Uncle Jack’s library. You remember it?

CYNTHIA: Yes, Mother.

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NANCY: Well! I dreamt it quite plainly. And they all came here because they said this was an enchanted garden. And (looking round.) I believe it is! (With a sigh.) Oh, Cynthia! It’s such a sleepy day, isn’t it? And I’ve got my poetry to learn. (She yawns.) But I know some of it. Mademoiselle said I might choose a piece (opens book, and points), and I’ve chosen this. You shall hear me as far as I know. (Puts book on doll’s lap.) There now! Hold it properly. And don’t stop me for the “and’s” and “the’s” like Mademoiselle generally does. It’s so worrying. (Folds her hands and begins.)

If we believed in fairies still,
The fairies would be there;
It’s only when we laugh at them
They are not anywhere.

Directly we are sure they’re true,
They all come back and play,
In woods, in gardens, and in fields
We see them every day.

But if we say they are not there,
Of course they go away,
It’s just what you and I would do
If we weren’t asked to stay.

They think it’s rude, and so it is.
My garden shall be free
To anyone from Fairyland
Who wants to play with me.

(She leans back sleepily.) I don’t think I know the last verse. (Yawns.)

If I should—

Tell me, Cynthia! (Very sleepily.)

(Her eyes close; she sinks back against the bench, asleep.)

(Faint music. Enter right and left a little Dresden shepherd and shepherdess. They seat themselves in china-figure attitudes one on each arm of the bench, upon which Nancy is sleeping. The boy puts his pipe to his lips (music continues). Nancy begins to rouse, rubbing her eyes. Presently she sits upright, and looks from one figure to the other. Then she smiles, and claps her hands. Both figures remain very still.)

NANCY: I knew it was an enchanted garden! You are the little boy and girl on the teapot! Now where do you really live?

LUBIN: In the Porcelain Country.

NANCY: Is it nice there?

AMARYLLIS: Not very. You have to be so careful.
LUBIN: You see, at any moment it might smash to atoms.

NANCY: That’s how you’ve learnt to sit so still, I suppose? I’m rather glad I don’t live there. I should be broken by this time, shouldn’t I?

AMARYLLIS: Into a thousand pieces!

NANCY: (Eagerly.) But do tell me what you’re saying to one another when you sit on the teapot? I’ve always longed to know.

LUBIN: We’ll do it if you like, but (to shepherdess) we’re awfully tired of it, aren’t we?

AMARYLLIS: Awfully.

LUBIN: (With a sigh.) Come along! (They get down from the arms of the bench very carefully, as though afraid of breaking. The boy kneels before the shepherdess, who turns coyly away in a Dresden-china attitude. Faint music. Lubin says or sings):

Amaryllis, fair and sweet,
See your Lubin at your feet.
Do not scorn your silly swain
Stung by Cupid’s dart again.

(To Nancy.)
Shepherds have to play this game,
It’s very boring all the same.

AMARYLLIS:

Lubin, are you sure you’re true?
Can Amaryllis trust in you?
Swains who have been hurt before
Cupid teases o’er and o’er

(To Nancy)
Shepherdesses have to say
Stupid things like this all day.

LUBIN:

Let us get it over soon.
Leave out all about the moon,
Stars and eyes and Cupid’s wings,
And the broken hearts and things.

AMARYLLIS:

That’s the way, you understand,
We must talk in Porcelain land.
(Lubin springs up.)
Here, we are not china toys,
We can just be girls and boys!

AMARYLLIS: Oh, we’ve forgotten our dance!

LUBIN: (Wearily.) Come along! (They dance a gavotte.)

LUBIN: (To Nancy.) We always forget we needn’t be careful here.

AMARYLLIS: No, here we can run and jump on real green grass, and pick real roses, and play with real lambs—not horrid knobbly china ones!

NANCY: Do you often come here? People never see you.

LUBIN: No, that’s because they’re silly, and don’t believe in us. Why, every fine day the garden’s full of us. (Carelessly.) Here come the Daisies. They’re not bad to play with.

(Enter right, skipping and dancing, six little daisy-fairies.)

1ST DAISY: Well, Lubin! (She runs to him, takes his hand, and whirls him round.)

2nd DAISY: Well, Amaryllis! What shall we play?

AMARYLLIS: It’s only Nancy. She’s one of the people who can see us.

1ST DAISY: Oh! The wind’s blowing! The wind’s blowing! We must dance!

(Daisy ballet.)

4TH DAISY: What a long time you’ve been seeing us, Nancy! Why, we’re always playing about the garden—pretending to be daisies.

NANCY: Yes, but you pretend so well! When you sit quite still on the lawn, how am I to know you’re not really daisies?

5TH DAISY: If you whispered to us we should laugh. We couldn’t help it.

NANCY: What a good plan! I shall always try that now.

6TH DAISY: What shall we play? If Nancy wants any other people we might call them. You see she doesn’t know us all yet.

THE OTHERS: Yes. Who shall we call?
NANCY: Let me see—(Suddenly.) The poor little blind boy with the wings and the bow and arrows.

LUBIN: (Carelessly.) Oh! Cupid. He isn’t really blind, you know.

ALL: (Calling.) Cupid! Cupid! Cupid!

(Enter Cupid, bandage over his eyes, bow and arrows.)

CUPID: (Standing in the midst of them.) Are there any grown-up people here?

LUBIN: No, only me, Amaryllis, and the Daisies, and Nancy.

CUPID: (Throws off his bandage.) That’s all right. Now I can take this off and have a holiday.

NANCY: (Looking at him with interest.) Then you’re not really blind, little boy?

CUPID: No, of course not. It’s one of the silly things grown-up people think.

NANCY: But why don’t you tell them you can see?

CUPID: They wouldn’t like it.

NANCY: How funny! They ought to be glad. What do you shoot with your bow and arrows?

CUPID: Grown-up people.

NANCY: (Horrified.) Cupid! How cruel of you.

CUPID: (Indifferently.) They don’t seem to mind.

NANCY: But do you kill them?

CUPID: (Cheerfully.) Oh no!—never.

NANCY: But aren’t they very angry when you shoot them? What do they do?

CUPID: Lubin and Amaryllis will show you. I’ll shoot them, and you’ll see. (He draws his bow and shoots. Lubin and Amaryllis stand in china-figure attitudes, and make love in dumb show.)

NANCY: Oh! They’re always playing that. I think it’s a silly game! Let’s have Blind Man’s Bluff.

ALL: Yes! Yes! Cupid shall be blind man. (They tie bandage round his eyes, and run about him, laughing. Music. Cupid finally catches Nancy.)
ALL: Nancy! Nancy! Cupid’s caught her.

(Cupid takes off bandage and ties it round Nancy’s eyes. All take hands round her, and one sings):

Nancy’s “blind man,”
Cupid’s caught her,
She will not forget;
All the charming games we’ve taught her,
She’ll remember yet.
Through life’s fair and stormy weather
She’ll think how we played together.
Nancy’s “blind man,”
Cupid’s caught her,
She will not forget.

(As the song goes on they gradually move away right and left. Cupid creeps near, and standing on tiptoe, kisses Nancy; then, as she tries to grasp him, runs away laughing, and disappears with the rest. Nancy gropes her way to the bench, and sleepily pulls handkerchief from her eyes. She leans back with her eyes closed. Music gradually dies away.)

(Voice presently calls) Nancy! Nancy! Come and say your poetry.

NANCY: (rousing, looks round her in a dazed way, and snatches up open book. Glancing at the page, she repeats hurriedly to herself):

. . . . My garden shall be free
To anyone from Fairyland
Who wants to play with me.

(As she is preparing to run out, she sees a broken daisy-chain on the grass. Picking it up joyfully it is clear that she “remembers.” She kisses her hand to invisible folk, and runs out calling):
Coming, Mamselle!