Fancies

DOI
http://doi.org/10.32393/jlmms/2024.0023
Published on
Tue, 11/05/2024 - 19:05



Caroline Stellings. *Poppy*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Pansies*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Lily*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Narcissus*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Daisies*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Mignonette*. Collection of the artist, 2024.



Caroline Stellings. *Rose*. Collection of the artist, 2024.

Every time I walk by a garden in bloom or spot a colourful houseplant sunning itself in a neighbour's window, I think of Lucy Maud Montgomery and her love of flowers—a love she surely passed along to the readers of both her novels and her poetry. The enthusiasm her fictional characters have for flowers is infectious. Who could forget Anne naming Marilla's geranium "Bonny" so its feelings wouldn't be hurt, or calling the "Avenue," that stretch of road near Green Gables arched over with apple-blossoms, the "White Way of Delight"? Passages like these demonstrate Maud's "gift of wings"—Mary Rubio could not have found a more fitting title for her biography of this woman whose vivid imagination soars over the commonplace and enchants us with its animation of the natural world. We can trace floral extracts from *Anne of Green Gables* back to her journals; she writes often about her love of old-time flower gardens. But even before the novels were published, the author was a prolific writer of poetry. The same poppies and lilies and roses and lilacs that appear in her journals pop up throughout her verse, that nearly forgotten part of her literary work that meant so much to her, and which, even

more than her works of prose, provided the most creative satisfaction, as she noted, for example, in her journal 2 February 1921 (*CJ* 4: 304).

Mayflowers, for example, she references many times in her journals, novels, and poems. When, in May of 1913, Maud received a box of these spring beauties from PEI, she was immediately overcome with both pain and pleasure: “I buried my face in them and shut my eyes—and in fancy I was back again in those old barrens a thousand miles away, with the blue harbour gleaming westward and the spring winds tossing the fir trees" (*CJ* 2: 118). When Anne describes mayflowers to Marilla, she declares, “they must be the souls of the flowers that died last summer and this is their heaven" (*AGG* 170). And in her poem “The Mayflower’s Message,” Montgomery personifies these lovely flowers as harbingers of spring: “We are the blithe forerunners of sunshine and of May, and many a wood-bird’s rondel and many a merry day" (Poetry 23).

I have therefore chosen a floral theme to honour the 150th anniversary of the birth of Lucy Maud Montgomery. I have painted seven botanical watercolours to illustrate “Fancies,” which appeared in Montgomery’s collection, *The Watchman and Other Poems*, published in 1916 (109). This poem not only epitomizes the author’s love of flowers, it truly displays her gift of wings.

FANCIES by L.M. Montgomery

Surely the flowers of a hundred springs
Are simply the souls of beautiful things!
The poppies aflame with gold and red
Were the kisses of lovers in days that are fled.
The purple pansies with dew-drops pearled
Were the rainbow dreams of a youngling world.
The lily, white as a star apart,
Was the first pure prayer of a virgin heart.
The daisies that dance and twinkle so
Were the laughter of children in long ago.
The sweetness of all true friendship yet
Lives in the breath of the mignonette.
To the white narcissus there must belong
The very delight of a maiden's song.
And the rose, all flowers of the earth above,
Was a perfect, rapturous thought of love.
Oh! surely the blossoms of all the springs
Must be the souls of beautiful things.

Bio: Caroline Stellings is an award-winning author and illustrator of numerous books for children and young adults, including the highly acclaimed middle-grade novel *The Contest* (Second Story Press) about a Mohawk girl from Hamilton, Ontario, who sets out to win an *Anne of Green Gables* look-alike contest. She is a member of the Federation of Canadian Artists whose works in pastel, acrylic, and watercolour have been exhibited in shows across the country. Her illustrations from the bestselling *The Malagawatch Mice and the Church That Sailed* were acquired by the Highland Village Museum in Cape Breton. She lives in Waterdown, Ontario, and makes frequent trips to Norval and Leaskdale, just to stand outside the places where Montgomery once lived.

Article Info

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No

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