

## Summers in the Cottage

### Entry 609

Every summer my roses are always the most beautiful on the block – why, in the whole neighborhood. And since Tom left, well, they've been even more spectacular. Missy Devlin says it's a compensation of sorts, a cosmic way of making me feel better about him leaving.

And the house is so pretty with new paint and little brick pathways. I just took out a home equity loan and then paid it all off with Tom's retirement savings last year. After all, it is a community property state and the courts gave me half of everything, including the 401K funds when I turned 62. Of course the other half of the money just sits there – waiting for Tom to come home and reclaim it.

And now I sit out in the front garden, smelling the heavy scent of my Chrysler Imperial – the rose, silly, not the car – and listening to the hum of the bees or the chirps of the little finches.

In the mornings Missy Devlin and I have tea in my garden. She walks up from the end of the block, slowly because of her arthritis, and we talk about how lovely the neighborhood used to be.

It is sad how this area has deteriorated. Houses are no longer pretty and uniform as they were. This neighborhood was built in the late 1940's for returning G.I.s and the big defense plant – long since closed down – was within walking distance. Why, in the 1950's, the block was crowded with baby strollers and pretty young mothers.

Now there are chain link fences, crabgrass and peeling paint. Nearly all the houses have been remodeled out of recognition – a garage apartment here or an ungainly second story there – and junk cars litter the yards. Noisy music night and day blasts out and there are times when I am almost thankful that my hearing isn't quite what it used to be.

But my little cottage is as it was built. There isn't a day that goes by that some young real estate person doesn't hound me with offers to buy, good offers, too. I was shocked at the appraisal when I got the home equity loan. All these young families, eager to enlarge a place like this. Why, there's room for a pool, they all exclaim, and an extra bedroom. But I can't bear the thought of anyone changing it.

Missy told me this morning she's going to an assisted living facility in Claremont.

"You should come too, Amanda. Why, you could even have a garden there."

I am going to miss her so much. I have long forgiven her for that fling with Tom, especially since she was left waiting at the garden gate and he never showed up with the plane tickets. Life will be lonely, but I could never leave my home.

You see, I knew when I buried Tom out under the Helmut Schmidt – yellow being particularly appropriate for him – that I could never leave.

END