

THE ENIGMA OF THE GARDEN FENCE:

By Ian Brown

I live in a house with my Mummy and Daddy. We have a nice garden. Daddy cuts the grass and plants flowers in the borders. Sometimes Mummy comes outside and cuts some tulips or daffodils to brighten up the house. Once in a while she gives me some flowers to take to Miss Ogilvie at school. I don't like Miss Ogilvie though because she makes me read books when I want to play.

Often I don't like to stay in the house because Daddy shouts at Mummy a lot and makes her cry. I like to play in the garden. Sometimes I pretend I'm an airplane and I run round and round with my arms spread out going 'eeaaaarrrrooommm'. Sometimes I pretend I'm a Red Indian. I climb the tree and shoot arrows over the house. If I shoot one over the fence by mistake, I sneak over really quickly and get it back before anyone sees me. I am really curious about what's on the other side of our fence. I get excited at the thought of going there. One day I ask my Mum if I can go. She's not too happy about it, but in the end she says I can go so long as I go through the gate, make sure to close it, stay on the path and come back by tea time.

The next day is sunny and my Mum makes me a sandwich and says I can go. It's a lovely day and I feel so happy skipping down the path, not knowing what will be around the next corner. On both sides I can see lush meadows and behind them rolling hills. I want to go there and explore but I remember my Mum told me to stay on the path.

Suddenly, in the distance, I see a fence – just like the one round out house, only longer. I go as far as the gate. Then I start to feel a little scared so I turn around and go back. Back in the house, I feel proud of myself for making the trip. But I'm also glad that I'm back. Besides, it had started to rain and I was getting wet.

It isn't long before I want to go out again. This time I feel a little surer of myself, a little safer. When I get to the lush meadows, I can't resist the temptation to take a little look around. Next thing I'm running, jumping, and following my dancing feet. I come over the brow of a hill and there below me is a big red house. In a big field outside the house, I can see lots of boys playing some kind of game. Then an old man with a beard comes out and rings a big bell and all the boys go running into the house. Then he sees me and calls me over. I'm really scared now, but I figure I'd better do as he says.

When I approach him, I can see that he has a kind face and that makes me feel better. He asks me whether I've come to join them. After I tell him a bit about myself, he explains that the big house is a special school where boys live all the time. He says that they have a jolly good time there, and play lots of games, and learn lots of things, and by the time they leave they have become young men.

I am so excited that I run all the way home to tell my parents all about it. They ask me all sorts of questions. Then they have a big argument and Daddy gets angry and Mummy goes into the kitchen in tears. Mummy tells me that she thinks that it is a good idea for me to go to this school but that Daddy thinks I should stay at home and continue with Miss Ogilvie.

For many weeks it seems like nobody wants to talk about it and I am not allowed to go off on my own. But one day, to my great surprise, my Mum tells me that they have agreed that I should start at the big red house school.

I don't know what to think at first. I am scared at leaving my home but at the same time excited. I spend many years at the red house school. I love all the games, and the friendships and even the teachers. I feel very happy at my new home and it becomes more and more difficult to put up with things when I go to my parents' house in the holidays. I always feel good to get back again. The

teachers allow us to explore all the valleys, lakes, forests and mountains for many miles around the school. They tell us that Life is full of challenges and that we must toughen ourselves in order to face and overcome them.

Gradually I get stronger and more confident. The land itself become my friend, my ally, my home. One day at the limit of my wanderings, I find another fence. On the other side everything looks desolate and uninviting. I don't want to go there. I am happy where I am. But alas! One day I am told that the time has come for me to leave. I beg them to let me stay but they say that it is impossible. They tell me I must go. I say I don't know where to go. I am told that I have a choice; I can either go through the gate leading back to my parents' house, or I can take the gate leading out to the waste land beyond. I really don't know what to do. I feel so confused. I know that my parents have missed me all the time I was away so I feel I ought to go back to see them, and this is what I eventually decide to do.

As I am walking slowly along the path, I meet a rich merchant riding on his donkey. He is very friendly and asks me where I am going. I tell him everything, pointing out that although I am going back to my parents' house, it isn't what I want to do. He listens attentively, and when I am finished, he says that he has a plan. He tells me that beyond the waste land there is a lake, and in the center of that lake, there is a large island. On this island, he says, is a wonderful civilization, far in advance than anything I have ever experienced.

He tells me that I still have much to learn and that on this island, everyone is allowed and helped to learn all they want. Then he tells me that if I am interested, he will show me the gate that leads to this island. I expect him to tell me there is a boat that I must take to cross the lake. 'There are no boats', he tells me. 'You must swim to get to the island. This will be a test of your determination.' Then he says that if I am successful in reaching the island, I can be assured that he will have left instructions with the inhabitants as to how to take care of me.

I trust this man and decide I am up for the challenge. He tells me to jump on the back of his donkey and off we go. After much travel, we reach the gate to which he has referred. The rich merchant tells me that he must leave me here and he departs wishing me good luck.

I swim and swim. I don't think I'll make it but my years at the big red school has taught me never to quit. Finally I make it. As I stumble out of the water, the ground hurts my feet. It is only then, as I look around, that I see that the island is a flat, concrete slab, stretching as far as the eye can see. What is even more extraordinary is that there doesn't appear to be anything on the surface – no houses, trees, animals or people. Failing to see even a fence, I suddenly felt a sense of great freedom.

But then a great voice sounds forth, saying:
'Though you see them not, this island hath rules which must be followed. This is The Island Of Symbols. Here, what was, is not ... what was not, is. Here, all objects in the phenomenal world have been replaced by symbols. If ye wish to perceive the Truth, ye must first enter the Realm Of Symbols. But heed my words, if ye stayest as ye art now, ye shall never see with clear vision.'

And I am afraid and cry out: 'Oh master, whoever you are, wherever you are, I am indeed desirous of knowing and seeing what is. Tell me how I may enter the Realm Of Symbols.'

And the voice replies, 'ye must leave thy body, and seek that part wherein rests the Realm Of Symbols. Sit down, discard thy body, turn inward, and begin the search.'

I begin to ask how and where I should look, but there is no answer. The voice has gone. There is nothing for me to do but obey the command. I sit down, say goodbye to my body and go through some kind of gate to my interior self. Everywhere I search for the Realm Of Symbols – past tense muscles and pumping arteries, past my beating heart, I head upward away from the noise and confusion. Then it is cooler. I am in a cavern with glistening stalactites and stalacmites connecting and strengthening roof and floor, marbled pillars interpenetrated and highlighted by occasional shafts of brilliant sunlight flashing down through the jagged openings in the roof.

This cavernous grotto is so full of delights, so beautiful and so enchanting that I see little point in leaving. But I remember my quest and press on. Suddenly, at the far end of the grotto, I come across a huge oak door, set into the rock face. Surely this is the entrance to the Realm of Symbols. I try the door and it swings open easily.

There, to my amazement, is the same scene that greeted me on arriving at the island – an endless vista of flat concrete. For a moment I think I am outside myself again. But then gradually, the more I look about me, the more I begin to see that this is not the same featureless plain.

In the distance, there seems to be a ... yes, a fence, a garden fence. I run forwards to see if my eyes were deceiving me. No, it is a garden fence, just like the one I knew before. I walk along the perimeter of the fence looking for a gate. Eventually, I find one, and rush through it expectantly. But there is only more concrete, flat, gray concrete with yet another fence in the distance. I can even see another gate. But I don't want to go through it, not yet. I want to explore. I want to find something. So I start running around the track between the two fences and suddenly I see someone running towards me.

As I get closer, I begin to recognize ... no, it can't be ... the other person approaching me looks just like me. It *is* me but wearing rugby clothes. We pass each other. I can't look at him. Why is he here? I hate him ... I want to kill him ... I'll get him the next time around ... no, I've changed my mind ... it's all an illusion ... I just want to get away, to get out ... where's a gate? ... I saw one a while ago ... didn't I? ... I'm sure I did ... oh, but now I see one ... and another one ... and now there seems to be lots of gates ... which one should I take? ... come on, make up your mind ... you're free to choose ... no-one's telling what to do.

Still running, I rush through the next gate I see. And I'm through the gate ... and there's more concrete ... and over there is a fence ... and lots more gates ... all identical ... and I'm running faster now ... round and round and round ... and I can see someone again ... someone is running towards me ... I feel terror ... I don't want to meet him ... I don't want to pass him ... but there is nowhere to hide ... but at least I don't recognize him ... or do I? ... he's wearing army battledress and a beret ... looking for a gate now ... need to break away ... don't want to meet him again ... here I am ... through the gate ... more concrete ... faster ... faster ... round ... round ...

And now I see them everywhere ... playing the 'cello, talking to my parents, reading a book at a desk ... all in different clothes ... army uniform, R.A.F. uniform, dinner jacket, dress kilt, blue shirt and shorts, blazer, donkey jacket ... and all with the same face ... my face ... all running around the track in the opposite direction to me ... faster and faster ... now the fence appears to be nothing but a succession of gates ... everything is beginning to become blurred ... I can hardly breathe ... I am no longer aware of my feet touching the ground ... I am being tossed around ... like a cork in a whirlpool except that the direction is upward .. it's more like I'm in a twister . spiraling upwards and inwards ... tighter and tighter circles ... faster and faster ... and suddenly, the force leaves me and I am at a point in space ... suspended ... all is calm ... all is still ... suspended and motionless ... held 'twixt heaven and earth ... 'twixt spirit and body ...

Is this the Realm Of Symbols? And then I look down, and far below I see the structure of the fences I have just left. At first, I see the concentric circles of the fences that had contained me, but then, as I keep looking, I begin to see contours appearing. It is amazing, as if I am watching a spider's web through a camera lens whilst the image is slowly focused. The web is intricate, incredibly intricate. In addition to countless fences, there are interconnecting radials spreading out from the center.

I am suddenly struck with the idea that if I can memorize the layout from this vantage point, then I shall have learned all there is to know. But this turns out to be impossible due to the fact that the more I study the web, the more intricate it appears to become. Eventually I decide that the only way I

can really learn about the reality down there is by going back down again and experiencing it from ground level. Bit by bit, fence by fence, radial by radial, I will come to know the totality of the reality.

No sooner have I wished to be back on earth than the spiral force reappears in the form of a helter-skelter. I take a cushion and set off on an exhilarating descent. When I get to the bottom, the helter-skelter vanishes and I am back on concrete again. But when I look around me, I can hardly believe my eyes. The concrete surface which was smooth, is now broken and cracked and gives the impression of a sea of crazy-paving. The neat circular garden fences have given way to a hideous entanglement ... a jungle of criss-crossing, colliding verticals and horizontals. Broken bits of garden fence jut into high red-brick walls with pieces of jagged glass jutting out at all angles, which intersect with pre-stressed concrete walls smothered with rolls of barbed wire, wrought-iron fences with spear-like railings, chicken-coup fences, red-stone walls, sandstone walls, limestone walls, custom-made marble walls and craftsman-made dry stone walls ... all jumbling and crumbling into and over each other. I try to remember what it all looked like from above. It is more confusing from down here. Somehow I feel entangled in a labyrinth of unyielding brick, mortar, metal and wooden posts. Before I could see it, now I only feel it. It is claustrophobic and oppressive. The garden fence that once offered protection and challenge, has now metastasized into an infernal maze that promised only frustration, despair and incarceration. The womb has undergone a metamorphosis into an open-air tomb.

There is only one solution. I *must* break out by any means possible. There are no gates now, no doors, no openings for escape.

So you start smashing and tearing and uprooting. It's hard, it's painful. You get scratched and bruised and bloodied. But slowly you begin to clear a small space. You feel you can breathe a little easier. Bit by bit, the fences and walls and barbed wire are beaten and battered down. Once again the flat, concrete plain emerges. But now you are so caught up with the spirit of destruction that you are hardly aware of what is around you. Now you are existing purely on a visceral level and no thoughts intercede with this inner urge to destroy.

Destroy ... DESTROY ... de-structure ... unmake ... undo ... nullify ... abolish ... overturn ... do away with ... wipe out ... demolish ... crush ... grind ... pulverize ...

Eventually, you find yourself at the same wooden door that brought you into this place. Gratefully, you open the door and you are in the beautiful grotto again. But the beauty does not quell the desire to destroy. Like Samson, you feel you must bring down this unholy temple. You put your arms around the two largest stalactites and you pull inwards with all your might. You heave and strain, all to no avail. You summon all your will-power and focus it into one mighty heave. There is a cracking sound like a rifle shot and one of the pillars fractures, and then as you continue to exert pressure, suddenly your arms bang into your ribs as the pillars cave inwards. You look up to see cracks spreading out in the ceiling like horizontal forked lightning. And then in graceful slow-motion, great chunks of rock fall whirling and spinning. You glimpse a flash of light above and then just as quick, there is complete black-out.

You are back within your body. You look around in wonderment. The island is flat, as before. But it is no longer pale-gray concrete – rather a lush green meadow, speckled abundantly with red poppies, blue lavender and yellow mimosa. You have an overwhelming feeling of freshness and newness, Your senses are heightened to an extraordinary degree. You lie in the soft warm grass, close your eyes and smell the lavender. It is so peaceful. You lie there for a long time.

Eventually, it becomes cooler and your body tells you to move. To your horror, you find that you cannot. The message is given but the limbs do not respond. It gets darker and colder. For a while you struggle with rising feelings of panic as you keep straining to move. You feel like an upturned turtle. Finally, you are exhausted. You give up the struggle. It is pitch dark now. You close your eyes and try to relax. Your mind slows down and after a while, you sleep.

When you awake, you are in bed in your room on The Cut. Now you can move. But while your surrounding are the same as before, your inside of your head has become a Tower Of Babel. The delicate fabric of your mind is being rent by sounds, jagged and amplified. Some of these sounds are from outside, like the sounds of traffic and people shouting; and some are from within, voices telling you what to do and what not to do. And it is all chaotic and unbearable. You can move your body but your mind feels like jelly – structureless.

It feels like you have no layers of protective padding, no form, no limits. You are completely exposed, completely vulnerable. The content of your being has broken free and is shrieking its way here and there. Your memory has blown its fuse, like a breaker, in order to deal with the chronically overloaded system. You have lost your filters. You cannot filter the incoming information. You cannot classify. Your judgment is shot. You can't tell good from bad, or even if there is such a thing as 'good' or 'bad'.

Space and Time become warped. There are people around you. They can see your weakness but they can't seem to help. You *need* them. You need their strength, their support, their security. Some say you are becoming a kind of vampire. Unable to subsist independently, you are forced to suck out the life force from others. The more they realize this, the more they want to keep away from you. And the more they withdraw, the more desperate you become. Things go from bad to worse. As people tactfully pull away, you become super sensitive to the signs of rejection and abandonment. The result is that you feel they are letting you down, betraying you. That in turn makes you increasingly resentful. Pain spreads like water on a paper towel. Your inner being has become a dark place, full of fear, anger, resentment, jealousy, envy, anxiety, paranoia.

You are forced to turn within once again. But this time you do not seek general knowledge or exploration of unknown parts. Instead, you look for specific solutions to help you survive and lessen the pain. Slowly, you become more and more convinced of the wisdom and necessity of the exhortation to give ... to give of yourself to others, to give in some way, in any way. But before you do that, you realize you have to give to yourself. You have to take care of yourself. You have to love yourself. You have to make a home for yourself, without and within. You have to make it warm and cozy, with sufficient light and space. And you have to design and build the garden fence of your choosing.