

Marrow

By

Theo L. Gardener

Published by and available from
The Endless Bookcase Ltd
Suite 14 STANTA Business Centre,
3 Soothouse Spring, St Albans, Herts, AL3 6PF
www.theendlessbookcase.com

Printed Edition

Also available in multiple e-book formats via
The Endless Bookcase website, Amazon, Kobo and Nook.

Illustrations Copyright © 2020 Mary Deaville
All rights reserved.

Copyright © 2020 Theo L. Gardener
All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-912243-95-2

"Some see things and say why?"

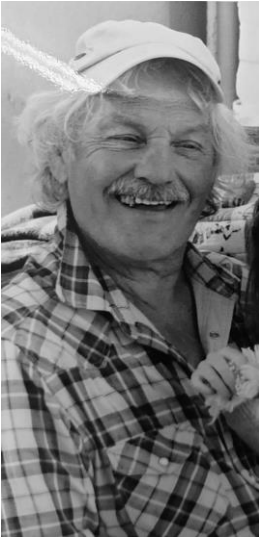
I dream things and say why not?"

(T.L.G)

"When you find yourself in the thick of it
Help yourself to a bit of what is all around you"

(John Lennon 1940-1980)

About the Author



"Ever since my mother introduced me to the Rupert Bear books, Alice and Wonderland, and The Once and Future King (just to keep me quiet), I could not get enough children's fantasy/ fiction. I read whenever I could, and it certainly helped me a lot at school with my English and other Language lessons! After reading and telling endless stories to my own and other children, that to my surprise seemed to enjoy them, I was encouraged to try writing my own. Endless short stories later, and children all grown up, I decided to carry on because I thoroughly enjoyed writing. A few years ago I took a bold step and decided to write a full length story.

"The result is in your hands. Enjoy."

T.L.G

About the Illustrator



"I have always drawn from such an early age; in fact I remember drawing with crayons and felt tips on the walls when I was only 4 years old. I was constantly doodling and I always took a pencil to bed to draw the curtains!

"Nearly 50 years later I am finally realising my dream to illustrate a children's book.

"During my life I have been trained in Accounts and this was my career until motherhood. Then, because of my love of children, I trained as a teaching assistant but my love is to paint and do all things creative. In Ross-On-Wye where I live, I teach art in my studio and online, check out my website www.marydeaville.com for my gallery of artwork and my Facebook Page or YouTube channel called 'Mary Deaville Artist'.

"I hope you enjoy reading this book as much as I did and look out for more stories from Theo L Gardener. I also have more illustrations to be shared in the future."

Mary Deaville



MARROW

CHAPTER ONE

"Well it won't do any good you just staring at it with those two full moons you've got for eyes, will it? You'll never hypnotise it, mesmerise it or levitate it, and I doubt very much that it will just volunteer to just leap into your mouth all by itself either, so I suggest you give it a hand, go on."

"Thank you, Granny," said Marrow politely as she reached for the last warm buttered scone. "Besides my dear, you were beginning to dribble, very unladylike you know," smiled Granny from over her glasses. "Now a lovely dollop of my damson jam would go nicely with it too methinks, but hello hello, we appear to be a bit short of it by the look of things," she said handing Marrow the almost empty jam pot. "Now my dear girl," she said, "if you are not screamingly busy today, maybe you would like to go into the garden and pick some of those juicy Victoria

plums, some greengages, oh and of course some damsons too, then I can make some more jam, a few jam tarts and mmm, yes, I think a lovely sponge pudding as well. What do you think of that young lady?"

"Ah, umph, mmm," mumbled Marrow through a mouthful of deliciously crumbly scone, "that um, shounds (slurp), like a really scrumptious idea, because while I'm scrumping, sorry Nan, I mean plumbing, I can have great fun climbing the trees."

"Oh yeeesss, and of course I shall have fun drying your tears and sticking plasters on your scraped knees and elbows as usual I suppose, scrumping indeed, just be careful," warned Granny Fern licking a butter smeared finger. "Now we can't do anything before we clear the breakfast table and get my kitchen all ship shape and Bristol fashion, can we, eh, now, last wee crumb gone down the cakehole has it? Right, let's go." With lots of clatter and chatter they cleared the table, washed and dried and put away everything neatly in cupboards and drawers. "Right,"

said Granny Fern clapping her hands, "to work, you plum, me bake, savvy?"

As Marrow hung the dustpan and brush on its hook in the broom closet Granny Fern got busy opening and closing various drawers, cupboard doors, tins and packets and jars. She seemed to have sprouted twenty octopus-like arms as she reached for this pan and that pot, this knife and the other spoon, all the while muttering away to herself.

"I'm off to my room to find my work overalls Nan, I'll see you later!" shouted Marrow, but Granny Fern was too busy fizzing around her kitchen like a whirlwind in an apron, and so she got no answer. "Okeydokey, now for them plums and a bit of tree climbing. Yeesh, I can climb trees even better than boys anyway," she grinned, "scraped knees, ha!" Opening the door that led from the now buzzing kitchen she stepped into the surprisingly large hall.

Marielle Petronella Elleonora Julietta Uffield, nicknamed Marrow because she was an inquisitive, adventurous, talkative young teenager, and every

year, because her birthday coincided with the school summer holidays, she insisted on spending a week or two with Granny Fern who enjoyed her cheekiness, (forever correcting people for instance) chirpy humour, and boundless energy, "A chip off the old block," Granny was fond of saying.

Marrow was equally as fond of Granny Fern, who was easy to be with, and undemanding, even though she was quite strict with various rules, "We run a tight ship here," she would say. She had a rich, warm, dark humour, quite often having a secret chuckle to herself, plus an air of mystery that Marrow couldn't quite put her finger on. They enjoyed doing lots of things together, especially in the kitchen where they would conjure up mouth-watering dishes and hold little competitions to see who could make the tastiest gravy, or custard.

Most evenings they would be found in the parlour, Granny fern would make herself comfortable in her favourite old rocking chair that had a very quiet squeak as if it didn't want to disturb anybody.

Marrow would bury herself in the various large cushions in front of the mesmerising log fire, stroking Perky the cat. Both of them staring into the flames with Perky purring endlessly, like a telephone buried under several blankets. Every time a log almost burnt through and gave up the struggle of holding all the other logs up it would be crushed almost flat by the ones above, sending a cascade of sparks up the chimney, adding to Marrow's, and probably perky's fantasies. Hanging over the fire on an old iron hook, a kettle quietly snoozed away, sending tendrils of steam slowly upward to play merry games with the smoke and sparks until at last floating out into the night, to dance around on the wind together.

Granny Fern would read endless strange and wonderful stories from a large, old leather-bound book, it had a smell that Marrow couldn't quite work out and it would often creak gently when a page was turned. It had a bookmark that was definitely a tongue of some sort that poked out the top, it would

just kind of lean out of the pages, doing nothing. At the other end, a small tail hung out that would give a little twitch every now and then, as if the book had the hiccups, Marrow was often very tempted to open it quickly to see what was inside. A constant source of puzzlement to her, was that she never saw Granny move it, yet somehow the tongue always found its way to the next page to be read. When the story was finished, the book would be put away in the glass cabinet, where it would lay, panting lightly. Sometimes in the middle of a story Marrow would lie on her back watching the prancing silhouettes flicker across the ceiling from the log fire's dancing flames, she swears that as she watched, she once saw the silhouette of the cat get up, stretch, then walk from one corner of the ceiling right the way across to another, but when she looked back the cat was still there, purring away on the cushion. Sometimes, after a particularly long story, Granny Fern would say "I'm going for a wee 'dut' now." A dut was her word for a nap, and for this she had a special pair of spectacles that had an eye painted on each lens. "So you don't

feel as though you are on your own," she would explain with a wry grin.

The cottage where Granny Fern lived was called Fern Uff (short for Fernanda Uffield), although for a cottage, it seemed much larger. Big, old, and simply full of nooks and crannies all crying out to be explored. On three sides were seemingly endless gardens, including a vegetable plot complete with a large, old, groaning shed full of dark spiderwebby places that Marrow had her eye on. The gardens were rich and full, with just about every plant one could think of, plus the wonderful orchard now full of ripening fruit. Granny Fern and Marrow spent many happy hours together working in this wonderland. On the front and last side of the house was a long and high holly hedge, always full of chattering sparrows, a big old wooden gate that always seemed to click open just before the handle was turned, led to a path that wound its way to the village not too far away where they would often go on their bikes. On the other side of the path one entered the wonderful

woods, huge, dark, vibrant and full of life and mystery. Rambling unchecked over most of the house were roses, honeysuckle and clematis, each sending its gentle perfume nudging at their noses as they both sat on the wooden terrace on summer afternoons drinking iced lemonade as they shelled peas or mended socks. There was a large front door with a rounded top and a shiny brass door handle in the shape of a Hedgehog, the whole thing was carved with pheasants and if you took your eye off for a second, they seemed to change places. The door frame was carved grapevines, climbing and entwining from one side to the other, this wonderful 'living' door when opened led into the large hall. Dominating one side of the hall was a broad stairway, twisting around like a lazy serpent leading to the upstairs landing. On the wall at the top of the staircase that seemed to be always half in shadow and half in light, hung a big square portrait of a lady that stared balefully down at whoever was coming up. To the left and right of the landing were long hallways leading to various bedrooms, storerooms and finally an attic.

Downstairs, the large hall that always seemed to be way too big for the cottage was always quiet, on a pedestal in one corner sat a huge broad-leaved plant, sometimes, as if from some secret place, a wee draught found it and it would wave its leaves gently for a while before subsiding slowly back to stillness. In another shadow filled corner high up on the wall, hung a strange looking clock with fingers that Granny Fern swore were real. It had two windup keyholes that looked like two small eyes and a sort of small mouth that would click every now and then, letting a painted moon or sun take place of each other, but at the oddest times of the day. Marrow would mischievously give the fingers a poke, then scoot halfway up the stairs, where she would crouch down and watch wide eyed from the safety of the bannister as the clock began to quiver and whirr and rattle, as if it were waking up from a long sleep, a minute later it would resume its steady 'hhick hhock' which actually sounded like someone clearing their throat.

Around the hall, were also many doors that had round brass doorknobs. One of Marrow's jobs was to go around with brasso and a cloth, polishing them all, and she would get up close to them making funny distorted faces. Behind one door was the kitchen, at this moment full of warmth, mouth-watering smells, and alive with the sounds of cake making. Another door revealed the cosy parlour, as it was always called, with its deep piled carpet, the open hearth surrounded by a large wooden mantelpiece, a bulky candle at both ends, each one with a slight lean to either left or right as if the weight of the flame were too much to hold up. Granny Ferns big old rocking chair stood on one side of the hearth, and the other side was taken up by the various much too comfortable large cushions, one of which was permanently occupied by perky the cat.

Two soft old saggy bottomed armchairs sat in the middle of the room looking very much as though they'd had an argument with each other and decided to sulk. One side of the room was mostly taken up by

a big wide window with a sliding door leading to the terrace. Tucked away in a corner, an old grandfather clock gently wheezed away the minutes, in another corner, a tall old chest of drawers leaned gratefully against the wall, on top of it, stood a radio that seemed to endlessly chortle to itself, and standing proudly against another wall was a large ornate glass cabinet that held within Granny's 'shiny things', plus family photos, the story book and an old horn gramophone player. Marrow would sometimes put her head inside the horn and listen to the endless faraway sighs and strange sounds, much like putting a sea shell to your ear. In the last corner a huge polished gong stood breathless, waiting. Marrow could never quite rid herself of the temptation to just once give it a mighty wallop. Hanging above the gong by a drawing pin in the ceiling, a sticky fly paper swayed gently to and fro with most of the flotsam and jetsam of the parlour's insect world stuck grotesquely to it, wings and legs sticking out akimbo, every now and then one of them giving a jerky twitch.

Behind the other doors in the hall were mostly quite dark old rooms smelling of wood polish and filled with a motley arrangement of antique sideboards, tables and chairs, all the while quiet ticktocks, sighs and murmurings issued from shadowy places. All the rooms boasted wonderful old wallpaper that Marrow spent hours looking at, finding hidden faces in the patterns. Every time that she thought she'd explored and knew all the rooms, somehow there always seemed to be another door around a corner. Paintings of forgotten people staring solemnly into nowhere, refusing to tell their secrets adorned most of the walls in the cottage, and Marrow had her own special names for a lot of them!

Humming to herself, she closed the kitchen door and began to walk across the hall, passing under the great stag's head with its huge span of antlers that cast strange shadowy patterns across the ceiling. She looked up into its dark brown glass eyes and whispered, "I hope you find your doe today Ceaser, my old friend." On the opposite wall, an old oil lamp

danced and flickered, making everything move and flutter like a puppeteer making his puppets move with gentle persuasions of the strings.

She had crossed this hall a thousand times and knew all the little games played out there, "My little circus," she would laugh. Still humming, she began to climb the deeply carpeted stairway, and as always when she got to the large portrait at the top who's eyes followed her everywhere, she would skip swiftly past, never daring to look back, then walk normally down the long corridor, past the old bookcase with its wonderful carvings of parrots and monkeys, giving each of them a pat on the head and a friendly word. Next came the great framed mirror. She would often put another mirror in front of it and create two passageways that would go on forever, sometimes she would stand in the middle of them and find herself with a hundred smiling twins. She found it amazing that she could see both her back and front, "My two secret halves," she would whisper to herself. Sometimes, when she just walked on past the mirror,

she would poke her tongue out at herself, there were times however, she would swear that she walked past but her reflection didn't, she would then step quickly back to check, only to see her own face looking equally puzzled back at her, and so on she would walk thinking "Yes, but, you know." This time when she got to the mirror she stopped, a bit perplexed because no matter what she did or where she stood there was definitely no reflection looking back at her, "Now that really is a bit wonky, I know I'm here," she said giving her arm a pinch. "It's probably just a trick of the light or something, I'm sure to be there on the way back," and so still humming she walked on to her bedroom. Putting her hand on the doorknob, she would quickly sneak a look back down the hall at the portrait whose eyes she could still just see, she stuck her tongue out at it, opened the door and quickly retreated inside, banging it shut and standing there with her back against it waiting for her heart to stop bumpetty bumping.

Her bedroom was colourful and comfortable in an old-fashioned sort of way, there was a medium sized four poster bed with a counterpane full of multi-coloured pheasants that was made by Granny Ferns mother, and seated in their special places upon it, a motley crew of dolls, puppets, teddy bears and gollys stared towards the door. A large wardrobe full of mostly empty hangers that were waiting eagerly to be acquainted with some garment or other harboured a faint smell of mothballs. A table, chair and a desk took up one corner and another corner held a pile of stuff she wasn't using, skateboard, tennis racquet, pogo stick, underwater goggles, and things like that. A few over full bookshelves were next to a nice wide window with a rich view of the orchard. Marrow looked out of the window finding the plum trees below full of fruit. *Oooh, plenty o' jam on them there branches*, she thought.

"Ok, so where are me overalls?" she searched everywhere but to no avail, "well they are not here are they, that's for sure, I've looked in just about

every nook and cranny." She turned to her mute audience on the bed, "Well?" she ordered, hands on her hips, "has anyone here seen them? You perhaps?" pointing her finger at a large balding one armed bear. "You sir have a guilty look on your face, come on, own up, eh, what's that you say?" She knelt down and put her ear to the bears woollen mouth and nodded, "Sooo, my Nan has probably taken them to be washed eh, thank you brother bruin," and she gave it an affectionate pat on the head, "you all be nice to each other now and I'll be back just as soon as I've climbed a few trees and picked a few plums, and I'll definitely have to scoff a few while I'm at it, won't I!"

Opening her door, she began to walk back along the landing, suddenly giving a shiver. *That's funny, she thought, I've never been cold in here before and now I've got Goosebumps, how odd.* When she got to the mirror, she looked, and still not seeing her reflection, shook her head. "Goodness I'm still not there, or should I say here, I wonder if my reflection had

Goosebumps as well? Hmmm, ah well let's go see my Nan she'll have an explanation I'm sure."

She walked on, rubbing her Goosebumpy arms, but when she got as far as the staircase she began to shiver even more, and a very strange feeling came over her. Keeping her eyes away from the portrait and giving yet another little shiver, she put her foot on the first step in order to scoot down the stairs, but then in mid stride found to her horror that she couldn't move her legs anymore. With one foot in the air, and the other seemingly glued to the top step, her body began to twist slowly, uncontrollably around, and just when she thought her backbone would surely pop out, she stopped. Half her corkscrewed body was facing one way and half facing the other, then something unseen was forcing her head up, and up, until she was facing the portrait. She couldn't help but look up at it, but the portrait had changed. The eyes that always followed her were now glaring down, big and dark, and mad, and strangely hypnotic. Try as she may, Marrow could not tear her

eyes away. Cold fingers were twisting and pulling at her tummy and her head, making her feel dizzy, then suddenly, her foot that was on the top step moved, but to her utter dismay it was not going where she would want it to go and she realised with horror, that she was being forced slowly but surely further out towards the very edge of the top step. The portrait had now started spitting and hissing horribly. Marrow tried to scream but something stopped the sound before she made it, and to struggle was utterly useless! With one-foot dangling in the air, the other balanced dangerously on the top step, seemingly also now with a horrible life of its own, suddenly began to move, slowly and alarmingly it slid further out towards the edge. She tried desperately to somehow pull her legs back, but it was hopeless, and no matter how hard she fought she just could not turn her eyes away from that mad face that was changing into something diabolical. The eyes were now completely black, and the mouth hung open revealing cruel fangs and a black, forked tongue that slithered out, and Marrow felt the wetness as it stroked her face and

neck. She felt herself losing all balance now as she teetered on the very edge of the stair, it seemed inevitable that she would be sent hurtling down to crash onto the marble floor below, to lie broken and bloody for Granny Fern to discover. Utterly desperate, Marrow could only picture her Nans tearful face should she come across that dreadful scene. Something surged up from her inner self "Oh, I shall miss Granny too much... Nooo!" a scream finally travelled from her tummy and burst from her lips as she began to topple over, then feeling the air rush into her mouth, and whistling past her cheeks, she fell!

At that moment doors slammed shut with a crash and a bang somewhere below and the normally mellow old grandfather clock in the parlour began to boom and bellow the hours, the horrendous noise was ear shattering and painful. Then, came a heavy pounding of hooves on the staircase, two gigantic antlers scoop Marrow up and set her back on the landing, then turned and thundered towards the portrait.

It didn't take Marrow long to realise she could now move and she didn't waste time thinking about it, she just ran, hard, pounding down the corridor but in the opposite direction to where her bedroom was, she ran almost blindly looking neither right or left just needing to get as far away from that nightmare behind her as she could. She sped headlong past all the closed doors until she came to the end of the corridor, only a corner leading to who knew where was left. Before she really knew it, she flew around the corner and pounded up a flight of narrow stairs, finally bursting through a door at the top. Once inside, she slammed the door shut and just stood with her back against it trembling and sobbing and babbling through chattering teeth, in-between sucking in breaths of air as fast as she could, her heart crashing so madly she thought it would surely leap out of her jumper!