



# Lavender and Old Lace

*Myrtle Reed*

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1905. Myrtle Reed came from a religious and literary family, where she was encouraged to be a writer. She became a freelance journalist after graduating from high school. Her poems, sketches, and stories began appearing regularly in such periodicals as the Bookman, Munsey's Magazine, and the National Magazine. Her first novel, Love Letters of a Musician, was widely popular and led to other works. The book begins: A rickety carriage was slowly ascending the hill, and from the place of honor on the back seat, the single passenger surveyed the country with interest and admiration. The driver of that ancient chariot was an awkward young fellow, possibly twenty-five years of age, with sharp knees, large, red hands, high cheekbones, and abundant hair of a shade verging upon orange. He was not unpleasant to look upon, however, for he had a certain evident honesty, and he was disposed to be friendly to every one. See other titles by this author available from Kessinger Publishing.

## Lavender and Old Lace Details

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Author : Myrtle Reed

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# From Reader Review *Lavender and Old Lace* for online ebook

## Jennifer Dallman says

Well written, wonderful imagery, but the end as not as strong as the beginning of the book, which started out very promising. Still, it was a nice book and I would recommend it for anyone who loves language, Ms. Reed appears to have quite the mastery of it.

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## Jacki says

Sweet old-fashioned story with a bit of mystery and romance. A line that I particularly liked : "It was as if Memory sat at the spinning-wheel, idly twisting the thread, and bringing visions of years gone by."

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## Jessica says

[Ruth gave up her job so easily (hide spoiler)]

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## Barbara says

*Lavender and Old Lace* by Myrtle Reed, written in 1902, opens with 34-year-old Ruth Thorne coming to occupy her aunt's cottage while her aunt is away. She's never met her aunt, Miss Jane Hathaway. Miss Jane has never forgiven her sister for running away to elope, but for whatever reason, she decides to establish relationships with her niece. However, she ends up having to leave before her niece arrives, so Ruth finds only Hepsey, the farm-girl working as the maid, at the house. Her aunt left a letter with various instructions, the most mysterious and inexplicable of which was to leave a light burning in the attic window every night.

Ruth worked for a newspaper in the city, but has six months off to house-sit for her aunt. Bored and restless, she explores her aunt's attic, the first "real attic" she's ever been in, until she comes across her aunt's unused wedding dress and some newspaper clippings about a couple's wedding and the wife's death. At first Ruth thinks the couple had been friends of her aunt's, but then surmises that the man was Aunt Jane's lost love who married someone else. Feeling she's intruding into her aunt's privacy, she leaves the attic and vows to stifle her growing curiosity.

She visits her aunt's best friend and neighbor, Mary Ainslie, who is thought a little odd by the community because she never leaves her home. But Miss Ainslie has a reputation for being kind and sending things to people who need help. Ruth finds her gracious and beautiful, and they soon become friends. Miss Ainslie also leaves a lamp burning in her window at night for unknown reasons.

Soon Ruth has unexpected company: a young man named Carl Winfield looks her up at the recommendation of his editor. Carl works for the same newspaper as Ruth but has developed a problem with his eyes and is ordered not to read or write for several months. He's staying in town, and their excursions eventually blossom into romance.

In fact, there's a lot of romance happening in the book:

Ruth and Carl  
Hepsey and a young man, Joe  
a long lost love recovered  
a long lost love forever gone

Ruth comes across as somewhat prickly at first, easily offended and angered. Carl is laid-back and merry-hearted, and once they got to the point where they expressed their feelings for each other, I enjoyed their banter and their relationship.

There is a bit of a mystery with one of the characters having an unknown connection with another that, to me, was pretty easy to put together, but no one in the book did until they came across evidence of it. The one person who did know of it, for some reason, never tells anyone else. There's also the mystery of the lights in the windows and why Miss Ainslie never leaves her home. There's one odd section where two people have the same dream of an old man saying the same thing to them.

The title comes from Miss Ainslie, who has dark violet eyes, always wears some shade of purple or lavender, and scents all her things with lavender. She often, if not always, wears lace as well. Various types of lace are mentioned often in the book: "Ruth was gathering up great quantities of lace—Brussels, Point d'Alencon, Cluny, Mechlin, Valenciennes, Duchesse and Venetian point." I think in those days it was a precious commodity, possibly made by hand.

The emotions in the book seem a bit overwrought sometimes:

Ruth was cold from head to foot, and her senses reeled. Every word that Winfield had said in the morning sounded again in her ears. What was it that went on around her, of which she had no ken? It seemed as though she stood absolutely alone, in endless space, while planets swept past, out of their orbits, with all the laws of force set suddenly aside.

The earth trembled beneath Ruth's feet for a moment, then, all at once, she understood.

That may be due to the author's being twenty when she wrote the book, or it may be due to the times.

But quite a lot of the writing reminded me of Lucy Maud Montgomery, though her first book, *Anne of Green Gables*, was published six years after this book. The relationships and romances and quarrels are similar to hers, as are some of the descriptive passages:

Have not our houses, mute as they are, their own way of conveying an impression? One may go into a house which has been empty for a long time, and yet feel, instinctively, what sort of people were last sheltered there. The silent walls breathe a message to each visitor, and as the footfalls echo in the bare cheerless rooms, one discovers where Sorrow and Trouble had their abode, and where the light, careless laughter of gay Bohemia lingered until dawn. At night, who has not heard ghostly steps upon the stairs, the soft closing of unseen doors, the tapping on a window, and, perchance, a sigh or the sound of tears? Timid souls may shudder and be afraid, but wiser folk smile, with reminiscent tenderness, when the old house dreams.

The rain had ceased, and two or three stars, like timid children, were peeping at the world from behind the threatening cloud. It was that mystical moment which no one may place—the turning of night to day. Far down the hill, ghostly, but not forbidding, was Miss Ainslie's house, the garden around it lying whitely beneath the dews of dawn, and up in the attic window the light still shone, like unfounded hope in a woman's soul, harking across distant seas of misunderstanding and gloom, with its pitiful "All Hail!"

That night, the gates of Youth turned on their silent hinges for Miss Ainslie. Forgetting the hoary frost that the years had laid upon her hair, she walked, hand in hand with them, through the clover fields which lay fair before them and by the silvered reaches of the River of Dreams. Into their love came something sweet that they had not found before—the absolute need of sharing life together, whether it should be joy or pain. Unknowingly, they rose to that height which makes sacrifice the soul's dearest offering, as the chrysalis, brown and unbeautiful, gives the radiant creature within to the light and freedom of day.

One of my favorite lines occurred after Ruth and Carl profess their love, but he has to return to the city for a doctor's visit: "She had little time to miss him, however, for, at the end of the week, and in accordance with immemorial custom, the Unexpected happened."

The ending was bittersweet – in fact, one character's whole story was mostly shaded that way – but overall the book was a sweet, clean read.

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### **~Sara~ says**

I was a little confused at times about why the main character was so rude and emotional towards the maid, Hepsey. Aside from the unexplained mood swings, this was an interesting story for its glimpse of life in the late 1800's.

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### **Lyn Elliott says**

A bit like salty caramel ice cream- mostly sugar sweet but tinged with salt and all melts away in the end. No doubt advanced for its time (1905) with the lead female character, Ruth, a working journalist, but she does allow herself to be persuaded by her dearly beloved that she should not go out to work once they are married and that he will provide for them both. A bit too syrupy for my taste. But then I did think I had picked up Arsenic and Old Lace from the book stall, and that is much more lively.

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### **Anne says**

This is a book the adult Anne of Green Gables would have loved. A rather prickly heroine, Ruth Thorne, comes to stay at her aunt's seaside house while her aunt travels to Europe for 6 months. There she finds her aunt already gone, leaving a mysterious letter asking her to light a lamp in an upstairs window every night without fail. And, Ruth finds some mysterious newspaper clippings while rummaging through the attic. Of

course, romance ensues, and the mystery of a long ago romance unfolds.

Most inexplicably to the modern reader, Ruth travels by train and horse-drawn carriage with a chafing dish in her luggage. Naturally she whips out her chafing dish to woo her hero with a meal of canned food! It's this sort of period detail that makes nostalgia fiction so much fun.

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### **Judy says**

The author was only in her mid 20s when she wrote this, so of course the writing reflects her age as well as the times. I was surprised (and disappointed) however, when her heroine changed so quickly from a strong young woman into a "wife."

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### **Erin says**

read this while hung over on new year's day. predictable in an entirely pleasant and comforting way... the perfect read for when you just want a good story to pass the time without having to work too hard at it.

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### **Lynn Demsky says**

Lavender and Old Lace is truly an old classic --- that should and will be enjoyed by people of all ages both young and old. Speaks of a time that was much more romantic then now but a time of old morals and ethics. It's a lovely love story with a mystery that all comes out in the end! Would recommend to almost anyone!

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### **Barbara says**

I read my grandmother's copy of this book 50 years ago, and loved it as a child. I re-read it this year, and it is still a very sweet love story.

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### **Emily says**

My first book by Myrtle Reed, written in 1902. It is a simple, romantic, Victorian, small-town plot about women disappointed (or not) in love. It reminded me a lot of L.M. Montgomery's stories. I liked the wittiness of it--the banter between the main characters was enjoyable, and I was really enjoying it until the main character's aunt made an appearance. I expected to like her to be somewhat classy, and I was disappointed that she was a bumpkin. The ending had me rolling my eyes a bit, too, as it descended into sentimentalism.

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### **Lori says**

3 1/2 stars. I always love Myrtle Reed's books. I underline passages for future reference and pondering. I enjoy the stories. I enjoyed this book too although I found it a little too sweet at times. I was happy that the end left me feeling that there was more depth to the characters than we see throughout the body of the book. More generosity of spirit and friendship. More understanding of another's needs. Lovely.

"And up in the attic window the light still shone, like unfounded hope in a woman's soul, harking across distant seas of misunderstanding and gloom, with its pitiful "All Hail!" p.38

"Sorrows that would crush some are lightly borne by others, and some have the gift of finding great happiness in little things.

Then, too, we never have any more than we can bear--nothing that has not been borne before, and bravely at that. There isn't a new sorrow in the world-they're all sold ones-but we can all find new happiness if we look in the right way." p.83

"I learned long ago that we may be happy or not, just as we choose. Happiness is not a circumstance, nor a set of circumstances; it's only a light, and we may keep it burning if we will." p.146-7

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### **Patricia Watkins says**

Read all her books in the 1960. They were very fun period pieces.

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### **Abbi Jane says**

I bought this book for \$00.50 for the gorgeous cover....read it and was extremely surprised to find an adorable little romance between the pages.

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