

# ***Prosperity Lane***

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*To anyone who wonders if they have a place in the world, I wrote this for you.*

## Chapter 1

Mrs. Lavender was undeniably purple.

Her skin only had the faintest purple tinge to it, but when she laughed or blushed, it turned a wonderful violet color and contrasted with her snow-white hair.

She lived in an old-fashioned-looking house surrounded by flowers. It was the smallest house on the street, but it was the least ordinary. It was dark purple, with trim as white as cake icing, and a porch that wrapped all the way around.

When Mrs. Lavender first moved to Prosperity Lane, the house was like all the others on the street. It was white and well-behaved and had a white picket fence to go around the green lawn. Mrs. Lavender was never fond of keeping people out, so she tore down the white picket fence. As much as she hated keeping people out, she loved planting flowers, so she overlaid her green lawn with lavender, red roses, blue hydrangeas, Peruvian lilies, and every other kind of flower you could imagine.

Everything about Mrs. Lavender was lovely but a little sad too. Her neighbors always thought her to be strange because of her purple features and unusual habits. Because of this, Mrs. Lavender didn't get invited to the neighborhood summer barbecues or holiday parties on Prosperity Lane.

"She is rather strange. She's not like the rest of us!" Mrs. Henley, the housewife across the street, said every year.

"Strange? She's nuts!" her son, Billy Henley, would say. But Billy was not a very bright boy and only repeated what his mother said, so he shouldn't be faulted for it.

One particularly sunny afternoon, Mrs. Henley noticed a sleek black car pull into Mrs. Lavender's driveway. Mrs. Henley kept an eye on the goings-on of her neighbors, and she knew that Mrs. Lavender rarely had guests.

"Who's that, Ma?" asked Billy in his nasally voice. He clung to his mother while she peeked from behind the window curtain.

"Hush, Billy!" Mrs. Henley brushed her son away. "Go outside and play."

"I can't, Ma. Millie is out there playing."

The Henley home was so large that it took up most of the yard, and the Henley twins, Millie and Billy, had to take turns playing in it.

"Then go set the table," Mrs. Henley said absent-mindedly as she continued to spy on her neighbor.

The car doors opened and a thin, sad-looking man and a proper-looking little girl exited the vehicle. The pair stood in front of the vehicle for a minute or two, staring across the lush garden overflowing with the blooms of early summer.

"Daddy, what a funny house," said the girl.

Temperance Brown was not what most people would call a beautiful child. Her mother said that her nose was small and disappointing and that her eyes were too brown. Temperance had a small gap between her front teeth that was the first thing people observed when she smiled. She had learned to smile with just her lips so she never gave a full smile and revealed her teeth.

“Tempey, you must remember to be polite to your aunt,” her father chided. He then added with a small shake of his head, “Purple has been your aunt’s favorite color since she was a little girl about your age.”

“Why have I never met her, Daddy?”

“She’s just—she’s just different, Tempey. Her way of doing things doesn’t match mine.”

Temperance didn’t understand what he meant, but she changed the subject.

“Is the inside purple too?”

The yard was bursting with flowers and foliage, but it was not wild. There was a clear, civilized stone path from the gravel driveway to the front door. Temperance’s father guided her along the stone path and up the front porch steps which brought them to two widescreen doors.

Temperance craned her neck to look up at the house as she climbed the steps. She pressed her face against the screen door to peer inside. “It doesn’t seem obnoxious.”

“Tempey, manners!” Her father nudged her as they heard footsteps coming from a far-off room. The figure of Mrs. Lavender appeared through the screen door.

“John?” The lady’s lovely eyes squinted in surprise, then a warm smile spread across her face. She threw the screen door open to hug her brother. For such a small woman, she seemed to have a lot of strength. Her brother took a surprised step back as she embraced him.

Next, she turned her attention to the little girl.

“You must be Tempey,” she said. “You have no idea how much I have wanted to meet you. If you like, you may call me Aunt Lily.”

Temperance was fascinated by the woman who was her aunt. Why was her hair white? Was her skin purple—or was that the light? Why did she seem so cheerful and so sad at the same time?

She swallowed her questions and instead replied, “My name is Temperance Brown. Everybody calls me Tempey, but I like my real name best. I don’t mind if you call me Tempey, though.”

“Of course I shall call you Temperance if that’s what you prefer.”

Mrs. Lavender opened the door wider and took a step back to let her guests in. “If you both will come in out of this heat, I’ll pour you each a nice glass of lavender lemonade.”

Emboldened by her aunt’s warm reception, Temperance walked through the open screen door. The moment she stepped inside the house she was a little awed. After she walked out of the foyer, she was surprised to see it open up into a hallway that appeared almost as wide as the house had seemed on the outside.

“Why, Daddy, it is so much bigger than it appears!” she exclaimed.

“The parlor is down the hall to your left, dear,” said her aunt.

The little girl paused to sniff a potted geranium on the windowsill.

“How very ambrosial,” the girl said.

Mrs. Lavender looked at Temperance’s father for an explanation.

“She is very fond of using big words,” he said. “She doesn’t always know what they mean.”

“I think that’s wonderful! Children ought to be encouraged to expand their vocabulary. How else can we expect them to become intelligent adults?”

The three walked into the parlor and sat on a damask pale-green sofa with red roses embroidered on it. There was a pitcher of lavender lemonade on the tea table, and Mrs. Lavender poured a glass for each of her guests.

Temperance finally felt brave enough to ask her most pressing question. "Why is your house purple? All of the other houses are white."

The hostess smiled and the little girl noticed that she had a dimple in both cheeks.

"Why would I want to be like everybody else?" Mrs. Lavender asked.

Temperance wasn't used to adults answering her questions with a question of their own, so she didn't know how to respond. She was quiet while she thought of an answer.

"Lily," Temperance's father addressed Mrs. Lavender by her first name. "I suppose we must get to my reason for being here."

"Of course. I did not think that you were here just to see my garden," Mrs. Lavender said mildly.

"No. I'm here because I need Temperance to stay with you for the summer."

Mrs. Lavender's eyes widened in surprise.

"You want your daughter to stay with me for the whole summer? John, what on earth has happened? Is Stella all right?"

"My wife will be fine," John said, "But the doctor recommended a child-free summer for her to fully recuperate."

The two adults stared at one another, and Temperance tried to decipher the silence. Mrs. Lavender scrutinized her brother until he turned an embarrassing shade of red.

"What's been ailing her, if I may ask?"

“She says I vex her,” said Temperance. Mrs. Lavender noticed that her brother didn’t correct his daughter.

“Oh, I am certain she didn’t mean it,” she said quickly. “All mothers can use a rest every once in a while.” She exchanged a silent look with her brother John. Then she put her arm around Temperance’s shoulders and gave her a little squeeze. “Would you like to stay with me for a while? We’ll have loads of fun and I can teach you all about gardening and—”

“I do not think I would like that very much. I would soil my dress.” Temperance stared down at her prim white frock.

“That’s what old clothes are for, silly,” Mrs. Lavender said with a smile.

“I don’t have any old clothes. They’re all new,” the girl said with a toss of her head that reminded Mrs. Lavender vaguely of her sister-in-law.

“Temperance is welcome to stay here as long as she would like. As you can see,” she said with a gesture. “I have plenty of room.”

John Brown’s face wasn’t happy, but it was less browbeaten than it had been when they first arrived at Prosperity Lane. Temperance noticed her steps felt lighter as they glided back to the car to get her things.

“Daddy, what’s different about this place? Is it magical?”

“Tempey, I hope you don’t fill your head with that sort of nonsense while you’re away. Your aunt has a condition that makes her purple and as for the rest—well, she just likes flowers.”

John Brown took his daughter’s bags and went upstairs to a snug little room with a window facing the street. Temperance clasped her hands together in delight when she saw her

room, but she didn't say anything. She thought about her aunt's "condition" and wondered if it was the same sort of condition her mother had. Except, her aunt had a tame jungle for a garden, whereas her mother rarely left her room.

Temperance sighed contentedly as she watched her father drive away. She had all summer to find out.