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The Garden was Deserted

by Tina Blower

The garden was deserted except for a red book, which lay sunning itself upon the gravel path. The gardener picked it up and mounted the sit-on lawnmower. One hand on the steering and the other holding open the book, he began to read. It was, as he started to understand, a first draft of a novel. There were plenty of crossings out and some notes were added on other pages, which made it difficult for him to follow. Once he got into it, though, he became engrossed in the story, almost running the mower into a flowerbed.

The strangest part was that the story resonated with him so much that it was almost as if he had written it himself. He recognised the lead character to be himself, a father who had lost his kids due to a particularly nasty divorce and who then went on to become homeless. The kids had been too young to remember him and the only way he could carry on with life without them had been drink.

Now, 16 years later, he wondered if any of them would try to find him. He had cleaned himself up and met another woman in recovery who was nothing like his ex-wife. They had moved in together and, 6 years later, were still happy enough in one another's company. He had a life-long love of nature and used these skills to secure a job as gardener at one of the hotels in the town.

Meanwhile, Jacob sat inside the hotel with his work colleagues. They had spent the afternoon drinking outside in the hot sun and all of them felt the worse for it. In the cool restaurant, they ate and chatted about the current project before going on to more personal topics. Jacob, the youngest of the group, started telling the woman next to him about his home life.

He still lived with his mum with whom he had frequent arguments. He had never met his dad, but his mum had always told him that he was a drunken layabout. His counsellor had encouraged him to write his difficult homelife down as a story, and his first novel was born.

To start with, he had found the process overwhelming and laborious, but the more he used his imagination, the more he enjoyed shaping the characters and bringing his own feelings into it. He usually felt shy talking about his writing, but as he had finished a first draft, the sense of accomplishment superseded this and he reached into his bag to show his colleague the book. To his shock, it wasn't there.

There was only one copy that he had written by hand into a red book that he had taken out every now and again to change and craft the story. Where had he last had it? A combination of the afternoon's boozing and the loss of all his work made him feel very sick. Shakily, he got up and tried to retrace his steps outside to the garden. Had he amended something out there? Just as he reached the gravel path, a man seated on a lawnmower stopped in front of him. In his hand was the red book. In his face, were the features that Jacob recognised as his own. The gardener held out the book.

"Is this yours?" he said. Jacob took the book. "I think I can help you with some of the detail in that," the gardener said through teary eyes.