

The Old Garden Shed

by Gill Stones

It was a perfect day for gardening. A gentle breeze swaying the rose bushes, clear cornflower blue sky above and no risk of showers. George hopped on his trusty bike and headed for the allotment. He whistled his favourite tune, while his black Labrador, Bramble, trotted along the pavement. They rounded the bend, ambled through the rickety gates and were met by a scene of destruction.

George's beloved old garden shed was in ruins! The ancient door was hanging at a jaunty angle. Blood - red graffiti scrawled on its panels. Windows smashed. Planters strewn everywhere. Bramble let out woeful barks 'sensing discord.

The shed had belonged to George's Dad and was a link with the past. After early retirement from the army, George took up gardening and volunteered at a local boxing club training young lads. George was tall and well- built with a cheerful disposition and a good community spirit.

After squeezing through the damaged door, George inspected the inside of the shed. His heart sank! Chaos everywhere. Gardening books and catalogues on the floor, seed packets scattered, and posters torn off the walls. His favourite old armchair sprinkled with soil , mugs broken and garden tools everywhere. What a mess!

Suddenly, a concerned voice broke through the gloom. Josie ,from the next garden plot, was hollering through a crack in the door. "Are you ok. George? Can I help?"

"Come in and join the party," he replied sarcastically.

"Who would do such a thing?" ventured Josie tentatively.

"Kids probably," said George glumly.

Josie ran a local organic cafe. Her curly brown hair framed a warm smile. Between them they made a start on clearing the mess. George discovered he was missing his old wheelbarrow, several new tools, a vintage watering can, and a radio. He was upset because his Dad's silver trophy was missing. It had been awarded for growing prize - winning chrysanthemums.

"Thanks, Josie, you're a pal! The old place is looking more like home now. The least I can do is make you a cuppa.

"Sounds good to me. I could do with a break."

George filled his old whistling kettle from the stand tap outside then lit the ancient primus stove. He fished out a faded garden chair for Josie then slumped down on his old armchair. The armchair was draped with a hand-knitted patchwork blanket which had belonged to his Mum. Bramble curled up at his feet. Casually he rummaged in a drawer looking for his old trusty Fox's biscuit tin. He opened the lid and it was empty! I don't believe it! They've even pinched my biscuits!" complained George"

"I was slimming, anyway! laughed Josie.

On their way home, George and Bramble called at the local Police Station to report the break - in. behind the counter stood P.C. Burton, a stockily built chap with a wry sense of humour. His heavy brows knitted together as he took down all the details. Next, he puffed out his ruddy cheeks and gave out a deep sigh. "Probably some lads from the council flats. We've had several incidents lately. We will make some enquiries and let you know.

A few days later, George's phone rang. It was P.C. Burton 's gruff voice. "Good news! We've traced your stolen goods. They were for sale in " Steve's Bargains", the second hand shop in the High Street. Your silver trophy was the star buy sitting in the shop window. As we guessed, the culprits were two youngsters from the council flats-Jake and Milo, the Rudd brothers. Not bad lads, but easily led. Single Mum. Large family. Short of cash. Do you want to press charges?"

George pondered for a moment to assess the situation. The names of the two lads "rang a bell" in his mind. He recalled the boys were members of the boxing club he volunteered at. George, himself, had been the product of a tough upbringing and knew its challenges. "Maybe they deserve a second chance "suggested George. "Could we arrange for the lads to do a spot of community service on my allotment?" P.C. Burton paused. He knew Mrs Rudd was working all hours, struggling to support her large family. "Well, it might do the lads good to get their hands dirty and do some real work for a change!"

A few days later, George was busy digging his new plot assisted by his gran daughter, Ruby. She was a student at the local Horticultural College and was

trendy. She had rainbow tinted hair, slashed denim jeans, and muddy red Doc Martin boots.

P.C. Burton strolled through the allotment gates, followed by two lads pushing an old wheelbarrow piled high with the missing items from George's old shed. The Constable explained that the lads were very sorry for their misdeeds and had come to make amends. The Police had a quiet word with Mrs Rudd and her sons had promised to "toe the line "in future.

The two lads looked sullen. The eldest brother was Jake. He was tall with spiky dark hair, an "Iron Maiden" T shirt and a skull tattoo on his forearm. Milo, the youngest, was rather chubby with a slight squint and a black hoodie pulled over his head.

George greeted them cheerily. "Hi, lads. I haven't seen you at the Boxing Club lately. I hope you're feeling fit to tackle all the jobs I've got lined up for you!

"The boys muttered something in reply and P.C. Burton departed.

The lads were given the jobs of removing the graffiti from the shed, helping to mend the windows and door and then re- painting it in a trendy shade of blue. Ruby, George's granddaughter, studied the two brothers. She shouted over to them "Do you two go to Grandad's Boxing Club?" Jake replied, eyeing her cautiously, " Yeah, sometimes."

"My boyfriend, Callum goes there- he's a senior member and is learning to be a trainer. Milo answered enthusiastically " I know Callum. He's cool!"

Ruby smiled."I think so too. By the way I love your T shirt, Jake, - my favourite rock band. "Jake looked up, paint brush in hand. "Do you like gardening and stuff?"

"Yeah, it's cool," replied Ruby enthusiastically." I'm studying at College and hope to run my own organic Garden Centre one day. Milo chipped in " Our Grandad liked gardening. We used to help him on his allotment. Mum used to make stews, curries and pies with all the veg."

"Well if you get all Grandad's jobs done, I'll give you a grand tour of the allotment." promised Ruby.

"It's a deal" beamed Jake.

While Ruby was showing the lads the raised beds, they spotted Josie weeding her lettuces in the next-door plot. She shouted over to them "Aren't you the Rudd brothers?"

"Yeah we are " answered Milo.

"Your Mum works part time in my cafe. Does she know you've been damaging other people's property?"

Jake replied passionately "It's the first and last time we do damage again. We were short of cash George is a decent guy and he's promised to give us a chance to turn things around. He is letting us help to plant out his new plot. We learnt a lot about gardening from our Grandad.

Josie had a thought. "Well, I'm always looking for quality local produce for my organic cafe. If you could provide me with fresh veg on a regular basis you could earn some pocket money into the bargain. "

"Awesome, " chorused the brothers.

Ruby winked at Josie, "Just wait till I lick these two into shape!" They all laughed.

The next day the brothers arrived at the allotment. Their Mum had sent some special chocolate biscuits for George. Ruby suggested she and the boys give the inside of the shed a makeover. They emptied the shed and swept the floor. Next, they put up new garden posters on the walls. The tools were tidied on a shadow board, books on a proper shelf, and mugs on hooks. Seed packets put in order and flower pots stacked neatly. They called George over from watering his tomatoes.

"Wow! I can't believe the transformation. Well done. Let's celebrate with a cuppa!"

They all huddled inside the renovated old shed. George passed around the old Fox's biscuit tin. Jake piped up "I really feel at home in this old shed, George, " as he munched his chocolate biscuit.

Milo added, "It's given us a new start!"

George replied, with a twinkle in his eye, "Don't get too comfy -there's lots of digging to do next!"

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