



Garden of Secrets

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The shovel pierced through the soil. The air was silent as a lone figure toiled at the land. With a groan, he deposited the dirt to the side. He came to the conclusion after surveying the hole that it was deep enough.

The slowly ascending sun painted the clouds with a deep purple as the dawn crept upward. The trees hid him from view. He had done this for years and had no worries of being seen. No one ever came to the park this early.

Bending over to retrieve another shovelful of dirt, sparks of hot pain shot across his back and he groaned, rubbing at the sore. Forty years ago, he could do this without a single moment's rest. With a racing heart and shortened breath, he leaned against an oak tree. He mused with disappointment: unlike the oak trees that grew stronger with age, he only seemed to grow weaker.

"If there is one thing this garden didn't give back to me," he grunted, "it's my youth."

The tree offered him no response. Unlike humans, who whined and nagged, the garden

offered him silence. The trees were his audience when he spoke. "They don't understand," he grunted. "They will never know my distress when the flowers were nothing more than dried corpses." Moaning, he dropped the shovel. "Husks of their former beauty." Through his efforts, the garden had flourished. The once yellowed grass of his youth now contained a soft emerald hue. The bed of dead flowers was now filled with beautiful plants, filling the air with sweet perfume.

He worked with care. If he was found here, his garden would be destroyed. They would uproot his garden and cut down his trees. His flowers would be uprooted and grow limp, their beautiful petals drained of life.

His hands shook at the thought as fatigue nearly overtook him. He needed rest. His old body was not what it used to be. Trembling, he withdrew his handkerchief and wiped at the salty sweat gathering on his forehead.

He would not let that happen. He would forever contain the secrets beneath the soil, where the true beauty of this garden was.

"After all," he panted, his chest constricting from the effort, "someone's gotta maintain this soil. Everyone likes the way the garden looks." Huffing, he leaned over to drag the body across the grass. With great care, he set the corpse into the hole and made sure the boy's pale face was staring at the painted sky. He continued speaking, as if

the dead could hear him. "And it's all thanks to me. Ain't nobody complaining about that!" As the dirt piled up and filled the hole, the lifeless eyes of the child stared up at him, and he paused for a moment. His gaze flickered over to the tender flowers that were to cover the fresh soil.

"Perhaps," he murmured to the boy. "I will soon join you down there and offer myself to this garden as well."