

*1<sup>st</sup> Prize*  
*2011 RHA Story Writing Contest*

**"A Withered Treasure in Rossmoor"**

By Karen Gardner

"Quiet! She might hear us!"

"There is no way she can hear us through all this junk!"

As the boys slid off their scooters and tossed them on the neighbor's grass, they shimmied on their bellies pulling their way through her planter of overgrown shrubs, dead flowers and unraked leaves from last fall. The boys glanced around at the 30 or so large black trash bags bulging full, lined up all down the driveway and piled at the end of the walkway. They never made it to the curb, so the trash company never picked them up. The lot was too small to accommodate all of the untrimmed trees, overgrown vines and cobwebbed-topped shrubbery. Her yard was actually cold from being in the constant shade, despite it being 90 degrees out in the middle of August.

"My dad says he's sick of looking at this house. He says it doesn't belong here in Rossmoor...sticks out like a sore thumb," Adam said.

"Yeah," Chaz replied. "When I told my mom we think it's haunted she just laughed and said,  
'no honey, it's just owned by someone who doesn't care.'"

"Oh, I care, Sugar," said a feeble voice from behind, "but when you're my age there's a fine line  
between caring and caring to do something about it. Besides, if you didn't have my yard to occupy your free time, what would you do for excitement around here?"

The boys slowly tilted from their bellies and turned on their side to catch a glimpse of the shaky voice behind them. They froze as they saw the tiny, heavily wrinkled woman in a huge floppy sun hat. She wore a purple polka dot robe and worn sheep skin slippers as she sat on a white bench with most of the paint peeled off, well hidden and tucked in the middle of the hedges. Sitting on the bench with her was a small silver canister with a clear plastic hose coming out of it and right up into the old woman's nostrils.

"Umm...Umm...We... Hello... I...Umm..." Adam stammered.

Chaz came to his rescue and said, "Well...We...Umm...You...We didn't...Run!"

The bushes cracked from the force of the two panic stricken boys thrashing through them as they bolted towards their scooters. When they finally hit the sidewalk they pumped their way down the tree lined street as fast as they could go. They reached the tiny corner park two blocks away. Panting, they sat on the quaint bench that was the focal point of the greenbelt. Surrounded by the sweet smell of jasmine crawling around the base of the tall oak trees, the boys sat staring breathlessly at the sky. When they finally composed themselves they sat up, looked at each other in disbelief, smiled, and then laughed hysterically.

"Let's go back and crawl in from the other side of the yard, where we can see her first," Adam suggested.

"O.K!" Chaz giggled in agreement.

The boys rode their scooters back to the old lady's house, but this time they went around the block and approached her yard from the opposite side. Once again, they slithered on their bellies like snakes through the dense shrubbery.

"She's not on the bench anymore, " Chaz nervously whispered.

"Good. Let's keep going to the leaf pile in the side yard," Adam plotted.

As the boys crawled through the jungle yard they felt like Green Berets on a top secret mission to save the United States from her enemies.

"You know, that pile of leaves are full of poisonous black widows," the frail voice from behind said.

The boys dreadfully rolled to their sides once again and looked at the tiny lady sitting on an upside down bucket against an overgrown magenta bougainvillea. They both felt like they would rather face the black widows than the 5 foot-100 pound human widow staring them down.

"Have you ever had Southern Sweet Sun Tea before?" the lady asked.

"Umm...nnno...yes...what?" Adam stammered.

“Would you like a cup of sweet sun tea?” the lady repeated as she gestured toward a jar of tea sitting on a rickety old table under the only spot in her yard where the sun managed to find its way through the canopy of tree tops like a laser beam darting through the shady yard.

“Sure,” Chaz answered.

Adam elbowed him in the arm, but then agreed to try the tea too. Both boys grabbed a plastic cup from the stack beside the jar and smiled at her as the sweet concoction quenched their thirsts.

“Thanks. That was good,” Adam smiled.

“You’re welcome,” she sweetly replied, “Come back again.”

The boys skulked onto their scooters again and made their way back home in silence.

“She was nice,” Adam admitted.

“Yeah,” Chaz guiltily conceded. “See you at the scout meeting tonight.”

Later that night all the scouts were in their neatly pressed khaki uniforms as the meeting was called to order and the pledge was proudly recited.

“Now boys,” the Scout Master announced, “We have to make a big community service push in order to meet all of our badge requirements for the year. We will start with the Beautification Badge. We need to find an area in our community that is in need of beautification. Any ideas?”

The boys turned and looked at each other with the exact same thought and then grinned in mutual agreement. They both eagerly raised their hands.

The next Saturday the entire troop of scouts and a handful of Dads with trucks loaded with gardening materials and tools descended on the old woman’s property. She was eagerly awaiting their arrival, with several jars of sweet sun tea brewed and ready. The boys excitedly greeted her and everyone went to work. The property was a flurry of activity as the hedge trimmers buzzed, the chain saws roared, and the weed whackers

whacked. Soon the old woman's house was neatly trimmed with freshly planted flowers in full bloom flanking her walkway. The trucks hauled away 175 bags of rubbish.

"Now the house looks as good as all the other houses in Rossmoor," Adam confessed with a smile on his face.

"Yeah," agreed Chaz.

After a long pause Chaz continued, "Did you see that creepy house on Kensington Avenue?"

"Yeah," grinned Adam. "I think it's haunted."