**Marian's Garden**

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**Marian's Garden 01: Beautiful Dirt**

Jack and I are working in the garden today. It's so beautiful and such a relief to finally have our own place. Our own real place with land. It's just a couple of acres, but between the trees and underbrush we can't even see our neighbors. They're there, but if it wasn't for the mailboxes and driveways on our way in we wouldn't even know. Jack has on long tough tan Carhartts, a long-sleeved white shirt, and thick working gloves. It's a tough outfit for the heat, and I keep reminding him to hydrate. Between blackberries, stinging nettles, and devil's club he needs each layer of protection. We're both fighting over the wheelbarrow. He wants it to pile up future bonfire material. I am repositioning the massive mound of beautiful dirt we had delivered into the four raised beds, our future orchard. I am sporting jean shorts and a tight white t-shirt that proclaims the time as 5 O'clock somewhere in the world. I win the wheelbarrow, partially because I'm cute. Mostly, I win because ramming the barrow against the massive soil pile and letting it cascade down into the bucket takes far less time than using a shovel.  
  
I quickly discard my own gloves risking blisters, splinters, dirt under my fingertips. I find the heavy wheelbarrow harder to pilot with slippery leather material between my hands and the rough grain of old oak handles. We started early. I work steadily filling the raised beds that Jack and I made the other day with beautiful brown soil. One load, two loads. This is where the pear trees will go. Three loads. I have to start actually using the shovel to encourage the large pile to flow down into the metal wheelbarrow. A clump sticks to the shovel; I use my hand to push it off the old but unrusted metal into one of the raised beds. The soft dark soil feels pleasant against my fingertips. It is cool and moist against my reddening irritated hands. I take another handful and squeeze it as I would pack a snowball.  
  
"The peach tree goes here." I tell Jack. The sweat has created a wide round wet spot on his chest. He sits down in the shade, tears off his gloves, and reaches into my cooler for a glass bottle of water. "I told you it would be helpful."  
  
"I didn't say it wouldn't be helpful. I was just saying it was a waste of time filling old Snapples when we could just buy bottled water."  
  
"We have filtered water, and that crinkly plastic annoys the earth." I step into the shade myself and grab my own. My own t-shirt is damp with sweat and splattered with dirt. "Plus, money."  
  
"Money?" Jack says incredulously, "From the woman who told me we have to purchase a mound of dirt?"  
  
I smirk at him. "You will thank me when we have fresh pears, and apples, and blueberries."  
  
"You're a blueberry," He mutters under his breath.  
  
I set myself down on his lap and kiss his sweaty brow. "I'm a what?"  
  
"Okay, you're not a blueberry. You're a cherry." He tells me, while he uses feet to make his lap, with me on it, jump up and down. "Right color and everything."  
  
I reach to touch my cheek with the back of my hand. Even in the shade, the sun's heat is radiating off my burned skin. "I should probably reapply sunblock."  
  
"Nah" Jack says with a wicked smile. "Just cover your face with dirt. It's already all down your arms and legs. His sweat and water wet fingers drag along my dust covered thigh drawing a little pattern. I watch him and giggle. I lean over to nibble his earlobe gently. "Marian?" he says my name.  
  
"Mmm?"  
  
He whispers softly as if it's some lovers secret, "I'm going to spray myself off with a hose the second I'm done."  
  
"That sounds fun. We should probably turn a sprinkler on anyway to help the soil settle in to the too.  
  
"Mair—" He whispers the first syllable of my name. "I'm going to do it naked."  
  
I look at his wicked smile expecting me to contradict. "Didn't I say you'd like some of the perks of country living?" I hop off of his lap and turn 180 degrees just to inspect his grin.  
  
"You know I love you, right?"  
  
"As much as yeast loves sugar," I reply. I bend down to reach into the ice chest, which makes him ruin the sweetness of it by smacking me on the ass. I flash a bemused smile as I stand back up with a melting ice cube in my hand.  
  
"Uh oh?" Jack says. I lunge forward sneaking the frozen H2O between his collar and neck. He dances around briefly at the cold then stands up. "Actually, it feels kind of good."  
  
I reach down again, this time squatting and get another ice cube. This one I slip down my own collar leaning back to ensure it slides into the crevice on my sports bra. "Ahh-ahh cold. So cold." I swallow. Jack raises his eyebrow at me. "It's closer to my core temperature body regulation that way. Near the heart, near the armpits, back of the neck. Those are the places to—I'm doing it again, aren't I?"  
  
Jack shrugs. "You told me not to tell you every time you're being a know-it-all."  
  
"I kept up my end of the bargain when you were being a braggart and a liar."  
  
"Hey those people at the bar enjoyed the story even if they didn't believe a word of it." He reaches down for another ice cube and closes the cooler. He presses it against the back of his neck and holds it there letting the melting droplets slide down his back. "I'm back to work," he said.  
  
"Thank you and I love you."  
  
"Yeah yeah, like yeast and sugar."

**Marian's Garden 02: The Hose**

We return to work and do so for a couple hours only interrupted by breaks to re-apply sunscreen and check for developing blisters. When Jack's got the underbrush reasonably cleared, his long sleeved shirt comes off. I can see his hairs are sticking to his chest with sweat. He drinks another water bottle, pouring what's left over himself. Then Jack grabs the shovel to help me. After a couple wheelbarrow loads, the pants come off to and he is working in his boxers and bare feet. I can't remember when I kicked my own shoes off, but my feet enjoy touching the packed earth beneath me. When we get to the last box I ask, "Stop for lunch, or push through?"  
  
Without realizing what he is doing, he leans his mostly naked body against the vastly depleted soil mound. He looks down at the deep brown dirt falling over him and mixing with his thick black leg hairs. "I—was going to say push through, but I might be tired."  
  
I look at my dirty and blistering hands. Thankfully, Jacks are a little less raw. He already has callouses on his hands in all the right places. Thick enough to be useful, but flat enough to feel seem smooth. Not baby smooth, but smooth like good quality leather. Tough and pleasant to the touch.  
  
"Ugh.. yeah," I agree. "Let's take a break and get those sandwiches."  
  
"Sounds good." Jack says nodding. He shifts from the dirt mound to sit on a fallen moss covered log on the forest floor. He lays down his back along the length of the log.  
  
I walk toward the sliding glass door into our house, the house I still cannot believe we own! I catch a reminder that my hands, and my feet, and my whole body, is covered the black loam blended soil. "Jack?" I say staring blankly at my reflection. When I hear his grunt I continue. "I'm gonna need your help."  
  
"Grrr." He says in a pretend growl.  
  
"I need you to spray me off with a hose so I can get into the house." I explain.  
  
He sits up and smiles at me with his mouth closed and his eyes squinting slightly. "Oh really?"  
  
He stands up and walks towards me, pausing only to pick up his discarded clothes. "I might could do that."  
  
"What kind of grammar is that?" I ask. I begin unraveling the hose.  
  
"Summat for a country boy, rather than a construction worker," he says, pretending to have a drawl.  
  
"God, stop." I say tugging the hose out more. "Country boy does not mean a southerner in this state." I hear the hose start while I'm still holding the end. I quickly change my grip so that I can point at him, placing my thumb over the end to spray further.  
  
"Please," he says simply walking away from the building. After a bunch of hot air flows through first water sprays around my thumb arching through the air and landing on his beautiful body. He laughs as it hits him then steps out of the spray trying to brush the dirt, now mud off his body. "That's cold."  
  
I redirect to spray him again, this time aiming at his blue and white patterned boxers that I bought him. He jumps away from the water, then rushes at me. "Why I oughta!" He yells quoting some old mobster cartoon. He pulls the hose out of my hand.  
  
"Eep!" I jump and run away, but the thumb pressurized spray collides with my body. It quickly soaks through my t-shirt and causes the my legs to ripple with muddy steams washing down my body. I bite my lip and force myself to stand still so he can actually get me clean. I step back onto the porch avoiding the massive puddles of mud we have made. Jack returns the hose to finish cleaning himself off. I look at his dripping wet boxers and mine.  
  
"Ahh, what the hell." I drag the clinging t-shirt over my head revealing a simple white sports bra from Victoria Secret. My jean shorts are a little harder to pull off wet. When I manage to pull them off, Jack admires my blue-black patterned bikini cut panties, also from Victoria Secret. I love the way they cup my ass. They are the only clothing I am wearing right now that is not completely soaked through.  
  
"Mmm," Jack says with a smile. He almost redirects the hose, to rectify my one dry spot, but I open the screen door. I am able to slip in a moment before the hose sprays over the glass.  
  
"You almost got the carpet." I yell through the door.