

The Pumpkin Grower and the Uncle

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She was cruising through the town, slowly and observantly; up and down streets never driven by her before, seeing how gardens grow, how fences divide and keep worlds within and without. It was enjoyable and calming to where she had been as she farewelled a treasured family member as he gasped toward that long and welcome goodnight.

There on the roadside under an old peppercorn tree snuggled a flat barrow full of pumpkins; large Queensland Blues, a price on each and seven in total. She was a counter.

As she draw to a halt with nothing more than a pie, roast and soup in mind, the smallest one called to her. She examined them all; so that she was sure she was right to want the smallest. Of course, it was not so small in a worldly context - just small on this barrow, her mind flashed to how her now frail family elder had tendered pumpkins and other garden delectables so many years ago.

Soon enough a gruff and dishevelled presence was at her side, "Best pumpkins this side of the Murray" he wheezed with a manic ratty little Jack Russell at his foot fall. "Bugger off- *opps sorry*- clearout you mongrel", he pointlessly commanded. It was clear the trade would need to carry on over the din.

"These look great" she said knocking her particular one with the thud of her index knuckle, "Sounds great too. Your handiwork I take it, grown here?"

"Sure are. Right out the back. Want to come and see the patch"?

She was extremely reluctant to move past the front gate but was taken aback by the invitation and admonished herself for forgetting the affable and open nature so prevalent and innate in the country. She accepted and she went in, the pumpkin grower and the ratty dog leading the way.

He ushered her around the side of the house- a place long in need of a lick of paint, a decent tidy up, the replacement of number of cracked windows and all the fascia boards.

Unlike the front yard, which was bare of growth, charm or life, the rear side of this house was an abundance of life, charm and growth. Vegetable beds were crammed to the fence line with varieties and colours unimagined, and all in differing stages of maturation. It took her breath away.

She noticed ratty dog had gone quiet. Relief, sheer relief; how she loathed small yappy dogs. The pumpkin grower had also changed. No longer gruff and wheezy, now rather puffed up and proud. His eyes glistened as he explained the varieties and tastes; the meals to be had and the trade at the front gate, he had his regulars. He also claimed he used a special soil conditioner to get this taste and this abundance and he said he would not be telling anyone, although many had asked.

She was anchored amongst these natural simple vegetables, beautifully grown and the source of all that was needed for basic sustenance. And she was also thrust back to times of her own family's ideology of self sufficiency and the accompanying generosity; she thought of the much loved vegetable man in her family whom she had just left and was nearing his end. Her heritage was of primary producers.

She noticed the quiet in the garden and the shiver of love rippling through pumpkin man who simply said "This was my wife's garden, I keep it going for her- she passed - 15 years and 3 months ago last Tuesday", he too was a counter.

It was 5:15 in the evening, the gloaming had arrived and after exchanging \$6.00, she took her pumpkin and her leave. As she drove off, she noticed a pump and hose system surreptitiously connected to the neighbour's dam; was this the special soil conditioner?

Uncle passed that evening and as she reflected on his life, she counted the years she had with him. Baked some pumpkin wept and felt sustained.