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Deposition of Harold M--Gardener, at the Inquest of the Hon. Miss Gloria Madeline Hastings, 21st April, 1936.

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**DEPOSITION OF HAROLD M—, GARDENER, AT
THE INQUEST OF THE HON. MISS GLORIA
MADELINE HASTINGS, 21st APRIL, 1936.**

I

The topiaries were just my pastime.
Clipping holly or laurel
In the shape of a begging dog
Or a crowing cock amused me
During slack times. Miss Hastings
Praised me for these fancies,
But hardly noticed the trellis
Of climbing hybrid roses
Outside her study window
That gave me so much trouble
Before the right kind of yellow,
Dark as gold, took the graft.

The croquet lawn was her whim,
And tiresome work, on my knees
Over every inch weeding
Dandelions and scutch,
And every day for weeks
With the roller to get it as flat
As a table. I kept it that way
For years, though no one used it.

At first there was plenty to do,
The elms on the drive to rescue
from fungus, the walks to rake,
The banks of perennials
To thin out and make neat.
By the second Spring, there was time
To try new things in the hothouse,
And clip topiaries in the hedges.

II

She gave me a free hand,
Never a word of the cost,
Nor of praise for the work,
When she strolled the grounds in good weather,
Stooping a bit on her cane.
But when she saw the shapes
Of the peacock and unicorn
That I cut from the privet between
The hothouse and the old stable,
I had to tell her my name
Before she could praise me.

She sold the parklands for taxes
When the new government took over,
And paid off the indoor staff,
But kept me on.
A day's work a week took care
Of the lawn and the flower gardens
Down to the road that she kept
With the house, though she seldom walked
Those paths any more. I learned
A new trade by taking the bricks
From the ruined stable to build
A wall. On her side,
I planted a hawthorn hedge
And let it grow wild.

After she sold the lodge
Where I'd lived from the day she hired me,
She moved me to a room
By the kitchen, and taught me to cook
Plain meals. We never ate
Together. In the evenings
She had me read to her.
I stumbled often at first
Over the strange words.

The house now stood in a suburb,
The elms on the land she'd sold
Replaced by bungalows.
From behind the four high hedges
We could hear the shouts of children,
The hammers and mowers at weekends.

III

We were reading *Vanity Fair*.
I thought she'd fallen asleep,
As she often did, holding the cane
With the gold band, sitting
Across from me in her study.
I stayed there watching her
Till first light surprised me.

I made a coffin from boards
That I took from the ballroom floor,
And dug a grave, not deep,
On the croquet lawn.
I was in her service
One week short of thirty years.

I spent that week carving her name
On the hearthstone I hauled from the house
To the lawn. Just her name
And the year she died. I knew
None of the other details.