

Lori brought out welcome cups of tea which we drank while making our way down to the bottom of the garden. We laid out the hawthorn saplings, teasing out their roots to separate them.

‘I’ll dig the holes,’ I suggested, ‘you sprinkle in some rootgrow, then I’ll plant the saplings and you fill in the earth.’

‘Sounds very efficient,’ she smiled.

I squatted down and dug down to about six inches, then looked up. Sure enough, there he was. ‘Look,’ I nodded towards the robin who had appeared on the fence, alert for any goodies we may unearth.

‘No worms yet.’ Lori told him and squatted down next to me. ‘Done any guerrilla gardening lately?’

‘I haven’t done any of that for years.’ I said, grabbing the first sapling.

‘Why not? It sounds fun.’ She sprinkled in some granules of the rootgrow.

I gently placed the sapling into the hole. ‘We got taken over by the Bassett ladies. They’d see a space that had a lovely bit of scrub, dandelions, all kinds of great plants for wildlife that thrived in such conditions. And they’d pull it up to plant something pretty.’

‘They sound pure evil Tim. What did you do?’ She watered the hole and we both shuffled twelve inches to the left to get the next hole ready.

‘Me and some others left and formed a splinter group. But I left when they started breaking the law.’

‘What like?’

‘They’d plant fruit trees and vegetables in land listed for development. Then came AppleGate.’

‘AppleGate?’

‘They mapped all the fruit trees in the area, then they’d gather up any fruit that wasn’t being harvested and leave it out in boxes for people to take for free. Trouble was that they didn’t care if the trees were on private property.’

‘You disapproved?’

Lori sounded surprised. Clearly she’d find my visceral fear of getting in trouble with the law rather wet. I shrugged noncommittally, and grabbed another sapling.

‘You can plant fruit trees in my garden if you like,’ she laughed.

‘But it would have to be secretly, under the cover of darkness to be true guerrilla gardening.’

‘Ooh yes please.’ Her eyes twinkled for a moment, then she looked worried. ‘Better not, my son’s got an air rifle.’

‘What?’ I stopped in the act of digging the hole.

‘And the other day he shot a magpie.’ She patted down the earth furiously.

The murderer accusation suddenly made sense.

‘Hang on, I haven’t put the hawthorn in yet!’

She looked down and laughed. ‘Sorry.’

‘Couldn’t his dad have a word?’ I congratulated myself briefly on my subtle approach of finding out her status.

‘He’s the one who got him the air rifle for God’s sake.’

‘Oh my days!’ Still, at least, by her tone, it sounded like they’d split up.

‘Yes, and...’ she tailed off, but I sensed there was more. ‘And, er... are the evil pansy planters of Bassett still going?’

‘I don’t like your mocking tone,’ I reproved her. ‘They lost interest when the pansies died because no one watered them. There’s nothing more useless and ugly than dead bedding plants.’

‘Pansy Gate,’ declared Lori, making me laugh.

I’d dug another hole before I realised we had planted all the saplings. ‘Looks like we’re done.’

We got to our feet and stepped back to admire our work. Two rows of hawthorns stood thin, young and trembling, creating a natural barrier between the lawn and the area at the back where Lori had raked all the old rotting wood and vegetation.

‘If you prune them next autumn when they get to waist height they’ll bush out and create a natural screen so you don’t see the wild area behind.’