

Story Version 1: Discovery in the Backyard

Tina and Michel discovered their special wild space by accident—by letting nature take its course. What with studying for exams just when the grass was growing its fastest in the spring, they were late cutting the lawn. They were so late, in fact, that when Tina finally got out there to take her turn to cut the lawn, she found a beautiful patch of hawkweed blooming out of the grass in the back corner of the yard, where it borders the town greenbelt. She decided not to cut that whole back corner triangle, just to see what would grow.

Then Michel found wild strawberries just starting to bloom in the uncut patch, and four small, mottled, brown eggs, in a hollow in the grass that his mother said belonged to an excitable little bird called a killdeer.

"What will the neighbours think?" said their father. "You know how Mr. Spade sprays for weeds each spring; he likes to keep his lawn just perfect. He'll be complaining about the seeds blowing over from our place."

"I'll deal with him," their mother, Sylvia, responded, dishing out wild strawberries onto dad's plate. Once he had tasted them, he began to think maybe it was a good idea to let part of the lawn grow wild.

Tina and Michel started spending more and more of their free time in the little patch of meadow that had once been lawn. They found that both the chipmunks and the sparrows seemed to like their little wild place too, as did the spiders.

"This is so great," Tina said to her friends, Shemekiah and Aloysius, one afternoon when they were laying in the long grass watching a yellow and black garden spider spin a web between two small willow shrubs that had sprouted out of nowhere. "We need more of this."

"Hey, I've got an idea," said Shemekiah. "Let's talk to Mrs. Smithers about it at school, and see if we can let part of the schoolyard go wild like this."

Story Version 2: Mr Spade Goes to Battle

Mr. Spade walked out onto his deck to greet the day, and nearly dropped his coffee mug. There, in the middle of his nicely manicured lawn, was a bright yellow dandelion.

It was the neighbour kids' fault, he knew it. He'd sprayed, and weeded, and clipped, and trimmed till he had his yard in apple pie order, and now here they were, leaving nearly half their own property to grow wild. It was full of weeds, and the seeds were blowing right across the unfenced boundary onto his lawn.

They were good kids, he knew; he'd watched them grow up. They were like weeds themselves these days. But they were nearly teenagers now—Michel was 13 after all—and they should be taking responsibility for their yard chores. Well, he'd have a word with their mother right away. But first things first. He grabbed his dandelion digger, and marched out to do battle.

"Come in, Harold," invited Sylvia, when she'd answered his insistent knocking at the front door. "So nice to see you. How's your gardening coming along?"

"That's just what I've come about, Sylvia." Although he was unfailingly polite, Harold liked to get right to the point. "I'm getting extra weeds this year—you know how I try to keep it just so, the way Mum likes it." He sighed a little, as he mentioned his aging mother, Eleanor. She had always been an avid gardener, delighting in visiting garden shows around the country. But she was definitely slowing down, and could no longer travel as she once had. Harold, a professional landscaper, did a good job keeping his own gardens and lawns up, and Eleanor could thoroughly enjoy them from her chair on the porch. Harold was very determined to "keep the place up for Mum," as he put it, so she wouldn't miss the travel so much.

"Eleanor must be proud," Sylvia soothed him. "We're lucky to have neighbours like you. I always appreciate the way Eleanor is like a grandmother to our Tina and Michel, and they love her. I'm just delighted that they're enjoying our own yard so much again, with their little wild patch. They haven't spent so much time outside since they were little. Remember how Eleanor used to like to watch them?" She put a comforting hand on his forearm. "I hope their little experiment hasn't been causing you problems?"

"Well, it is a bit of a bother," said Mr. Spade, mellowing a little. "It is rather nice to see the kids outside, though, as you say . . ."