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Libellum

*The New Shed*

On the cold morning of November 16, 1996, Mr. Smith woke to the sound of his garden's flimsy shed rattling back and forth. Disturbed by the sound, he got dressed and went down to do check on it. The shed was old, broken down and unsteady, but to him it did not matter. Since his wife's passing, this garden had been his only source of happiness. Tending to it daily, he cared and talked to each one of his plants with as much care and joy as he used to do with her.

When Mr. Smith got to his shed, he opened the door, expecting to see his tulips by the entrance. Instead, he saw a girl. A thin, short and pale girl. She appeared to be around fifteen years old, and in extremely weak conditions. Startled, she flinched, clutching her fists and getting in a protective stance.

"I am not going to hurt you" said Mr. Smith, worried for her wellbeing. The girl slowly loosened herself and looked at him, assessing the situation. Scared, but with no choice, she quickly opened her mouth and blurted out the truth; "My name is Lia, I am 16 years old, I was not stealing, I promise, it is cold and I had nowhere else to go, I am so sorry, I will leave right now." As the words came out of her mouth, she tried to go for the door. Mr. Smith blocked her way, and told her she was crazy if she thought she was leaving in this cold weather with nowhere to go. Lia did not want to, but Mr. Smith was so adamant, she had no choice but to stay.

As they got inside, she quickly went for the fireplace. Mr. Smith got her a change of clothes, something warm and cozy. He made food and sat down with her, and they formally introduced each other for the first time. Lia was a girl who had been in the system since she was 8 years old, in every house she was assigned to she faced abuse, neglect and abandonment. She had been through 12 families already, the last one was so bad she simply escaped and had been roaming freely for about two years now. No one had ever come looking for her, and she was okay with that. Feeling deeply saddened by Lia's story, Mr. Smith offered her a room in his house and told her she could stay for as long as she pleased. Lia was skeptical and absolutely terrified, but she had nothing else to lose, so she took his offer with open hands.

Throughout the next couple of weeks, Lia started to show signs of being a normal teenager. It was a slow process, but it was a normality she had never encountered before. Mr.

Smith had warmed up to her. The old man who was once sad, grumpy and had no more purpose, now shined like he hadn't in years.

Lia went to school and made new friends. Eventually, they all came to see Mr. Smith's big beautiful garden. It was amazing. Rows of deep blue crimson with petals as soft as clouds. In the center, a patch of hydrangeas stretched out. Right next to it, clusters of lavender rising up, their scent lingering every corner of the shed. Right at the center, big colorful tulips forming a circle. Lia felt as if she needed to thank Mr. Smith for everything he had done for her, so she recruited her friends to help her build him a new shed for his garden. They gathered the materials and waited for a day where Mr. Smith was out of town.

When the day finally arrived, everyone got to work as fast as they could. They teared everything down, making sure to leave every plant intact, and constructed a sturdy and safe shed. When Mr. Smith got home, he saw it. His eyes lit up in ways they hadn't before. He went up to Lia and thanked her, with tears in his eyes, he told her she was the daughter he never knew he needed.

Initially, Lia was the one who needed saving, she clung to Mr. Smith like a stray animal that needed a home. He did the same exact thing, Lia filled a void inside of him he was not aware of. They found each other when they least expected it and mutually saved their lives. This newly fixed shed was not only a shed, it was a new beginning. It marked the resilience of both Lia and Mr. Smith. They became each other's found family.