

Stirring Of The Wind

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HE LEANED ON his rake and surveyed the results of his efforts. Nine neat piles, the dark green grass between them virtually free of leaves save for where one or two had escaped the pull of the tines and fallen from the path of the rake. He breathed deep of the autumn scents and smiled. The year was not yet old enough to have a winter chill, but had left summer far behind. Mornings like today – mist-shrouded and mysterious, damp and cool – were his favourites. One could do a day's work without breaking sweat and have time left in the still lengthy evenings to enjoy the view, or sit on the deck and savour a glass of wine.

A gust of wind teased his hair as he stood looking over the valley. A few leaves from the tallest piles shook themselves loose and fluttered away onto the grass. He pulled a plastic garden sack from his pocket and began stuffing it with leaves, anxious to complete the clearing up before the wind undid his day's work. As he grabbed handful after handful of the leathery brown leaves their sweet musky odour filled his nostrils, shaking loose memories of school mornings when he and Kate would kick their way to class, scattering the yellow, red and brown threads of the road rug with their polished patent leather, creating new patterns and shapes as the leaves flew and fell, flew and fell. Laughing at the gentle souging and the smells and the joyous feeling of togetherness, the excitement of a new year ahead. New knowledge and new possibilities, coupled with pangs of old yearning. Wondering whether this

would be the year she would start to look at him as more than the boy next door. Kate of the autumn-red hair and brown, gold-flecked eyes that shone and flashed as she laughed at his silly jokes. He played the clown for her to hide his longing. Cracked a joke to mask his embarrassment at the strength of feeling inside him. Stole a sidelong glance at the wonderful curves of her growing body. And fought down the need to declare himself in love with her, for fear of frightening her away.

The wind spoke again, and the trees answered. Sighing and rustling. He dashed away a tear with his gloved hand, the suede rough against his cheek. He knotted his bag, stood, and surveyed the garden once again. The few tentative gusts had blurred the edges of his piles, flattening and spreading them out. Sending handfuls of carefully collected leaves back out across the grass. Another few years and it would be too much for him to manage on his own, especially at this time of year. Too many trees, too much grass. And way too many memories. He always knew the leaves would unlock his past. Like evil spirits flying from Pandora's box, those bitter-sweet rememberings were always set free at this time of year. The season in which he'd had Kate, and the same season he'd lost her. The world had lost her. Like walking into a winter that never ended, and all that was left was cold and dark, crisp and bleak and featureless like a land buried beneath a lifetime of snow. Where Spring could never come