

## *The Garden*

The sun was shining in the quaint village of Ivesborough. Like most villages in the country, Ivesborough was filled with gardens. In place of lawns, delilahs, poppies, and azaleas grew in abundance. Jeff Berry's garden stood out from the many that surrounded it. The garden sprawled from his doorstep to the edge of the road, and a few feet from his mailbox stood an enormous garden gnome. Every inch of Jeff's yard was packed with blooms of flowers, no two were the same color.

Well, almost every inch. Cutting diagonally through the center of this multicolored perfection was a deep furrow. Mutilated flowers were scattered in every direction around the fissure of dirt, and Jeff Berry was sitting, cross-legged, in the center of the imperfection with hundreds of tiny seeds in his hand.

"Good morning Mr. Berry!" An elderly man called out from his neighboring (and less impressive) garden.

"You are quite right, Herbert!" Jeff replied. "Not a cloud in the sky..."

Despite waking up to find his garden defaced, Jeff was in a good mood. Garden destruction was commonplace in Ivesborough. Every week a resident would wake up to find gullies cutting through their spring blossoms.

"That's a nasty one, sonny!" Herbert declared as he walked toward Jeff through the furrow. Watching the elderly man in suspenders leaning left and right to keep his balance in the thin scar that traversed his garden reminded Jeff of a tightrope performer. When Herbert reached Jeff, he lowered himself to one knee and whispered, "Did the spaders find it?"

"Nearly. They cut through the cable back behind me, but I don't think they noticed that it led to the gnome."



I suppose you are wondering what a spader is and, more importantly, what seeds Jeff was planting. To answer the latter, Jeff was planting multicolored poppies. The former requires a lengthier explanation.

In 2031, the U.S. government banned the internet. Within a span of 36 hours, every wire that connected servers in America was cut. Even undersea fiber optic internet cables that connected the United States to the rest of the online world were severed by NOAA's remotely operated submarines. One day, the average Joe could browse Amazon.com and have a product delivered to his door five hours later by a drone. The next, Joe had to wait for an Amazon catalog and place an order by phone or through the mail.

A week after the ban took effect, the National Guard went door to door asking residents to give up their computers and smartphones. Although, without the infrastructure in place for the internet this request seemed useless. Besides, anyone with an ounce of common sense hid their computers away before the soldiers came knocking.

A lot of people blame the president for the fateful events of '31. After all, he signed the ban into effect. However, the ridiculous idea came from a bunch of grumpy small business owners and tradesfolk. They had had enough of online shopping. Small Business Saturday was the only thing that encouraged customers to shop local and that only came once a year. Amazon, Facebook Marketplace, and YouTube Vendorspace all but drove local businesses to the dumps with their outrageously cheap prices and swift deliveries. The nationwide outrage of local business owners made luddite politicians giddy with fantasies of ending the evil, confusing internet. When a conglomeration of bricklayers and blacksmiths declared that do-it-yourself YouTube videos were losing them essential customers, half the country thought it was time to turn back the clocks on technology (and the other half was surprised to learn that blacksmiths and bricklayers survived the Age of Enlightenment). Even magicians were shouting that it was time to shut down the network that had revealed their most precious secrets.

Whether it was small business owners, bricklayers, or the president of the U.S.A., the whole world laughed as America stepped backward into a simpler time. Business went from global to local overnight, but, one year later, it was clear that the internet was far from gone.



Criminals sold laptops acquired from overseas in shady alleyways and tech-savvy individuals began plotting a new network. A few months after the ban, Sarah Sarason built a modem to connect a computer to her landline. Then she sent information to her friend down the road who converted the sounds into text with his own modem. This is what he read:

Help! The police are outside my door! They are accusing me of using dial-up internet to bring destruction upon the business owners and tradesfolk of the United States!

Unfortunately for Sara, it turned out that the government had anticipated the return of dial-up internet. Shortly after banning the internet, the FBI created thousands of war-dialer programs. The war-dialers called millions of phone-numbers every day in hopes of finding a modem. Within an hour of setting it up, Sara Sarason's modem was found, the phone number logged, and the police were sent to her door.

However, the war to bring back the internet was far from over. One week after the failed dial-up attempt. A gardener in South Dakota by the name of Art Turpentine buried a fiber optic wire under his lawn and connected it to a large gnome. The gnome was actually a homemade server of sorts, but the FBI didn't need to know that. After explaining his gnome to a bunch of Selectmen in a town meeting, Art got his entire community involved in reviving the internet. Late at night, the residents of Pukawana dug trenches in their lawns to hide fiber-optic wires. By dawn, the entire town of Pukwana was wired to Mr. Turpentine's gnome—but there was a problem.

Every home in Pukwana had a line of dirt that stretched to their road. These lines of dirt converged by mailboxes and roadsides and, ultimately, snaked to a certain gnome outside of the Turpentine residence.

"It's—it's too suspicious!" Art shouted in a town meeting one week later.

"They'll find out, and I'll go to jail!"

Little Dirk Doyle, a red-haired boy who was known to bike around town had the solution.



“If everyone dug up their lawns and planted flowers, the policemen won’t be able to see dirt streaks leadin’ straight to your gnome, mister! All they’ll see are gardens! Ain’t nothin’ suspicious about tillin’ a garden!”

Just like that, Pukwana became the most picturesque village in South Dakota—or one of the most picturesque. It’s neighboring town, Hoopleville, became filled with gardens as well. The garden magazine, *Flowers, Fantastic!*, stated that Hoopleville and Pukwana had well over one million flowers together. Unbeknownst to the rest of the country, the two towns had sent thousands of emails and created multiple forums. Mr. Turpentine had created the first server which hosted various villager-made websites for a small fee. Both towns had a large gnome. One was outside of the residence of Art Turpentine and the other was next to the mailbox of Hugh Turpentine, his brother. These gnomes both contained a server and a router and would become the precedent for connecting town garden networks.

One year after the two towns in South Dakota were featured in multiple gardening magazines, hundreds of towns had followed suit. By 2033, thousands of villages across the U.S. were connected by gnome. *Flowers Fantastic!* gave up reporting on gardening towns when it became rare to find a home with a regular lawn. The word “gnome” became slang for Art’s server/router and was replicated from California to Maine. In every garden-town, there was a tech-savvy villager who decided to build his or her own gnome. Then, the rest of the villagers would bury wires a foot under the ground and connect them to the gnome (under the protection of gardens, of course). Villagers would purchase modems from vendors in shady places and connect their computers to fiber-optic wires that led to their town gnome.

This form of internet became known as *The Garden* for obvious reasons. Computer scientists and engineers began building small data centers in their basements. Since these servers and data centers were wired into *The Garden*, any town with a gnome could access them. Popular sites began to emerge. Nickopedia, created by Nicholas Billingsworth, was inspired by an earlier online encyclopedia (I can’t remember its name). Huckster became a marketplace for people to sell goods (purchases were made by mailing money to vendors).

An underground internet emerged right under the FBI’s nose. The government war-dialers found nothing because every computer connected directly to a gnome through



underground cables, not telephone network. The radio signals that gnomes used to send data across the garden to the appropriate data centers, servers, and, finally, clients were rather weak since every gnome was only miles apart. These signals did not arouse suspicion, so *The Garden* was a major success.

Now that you understand the garden, let's return to Jeff Berry! Oh...wait. You are still wondering about spaders so Jeff will have to be patient. The FBI was not suspicious about weak radio signals, but agents found the overnight gardening craze a little fishy. After digging up a fiber-optic wire in Mr. Samuel Jamison's garden in Louisiana, the government knew that the gardens were harboring a secret form of communication. The president decided it was a bad idea to arrest every person participating in *The Garden* since that would put about 80% of the U.S. population in jail. Instead, he made the FBI train thousands of agents to disguise themselves as landscapers. Every night, "landscapers" with creepy white vans would pick a garden to search. They would leap out of their vans with spades in hand and dig trenches in hopes of finding and cutting fiber-optic wires. Naturally, the FBI landscaping team became known as "spaders" because of the ridiculous, heart-shaped spades they used to destroy flowerbeds.

Now, it is time to return to Jeff Berry who just fixed his cable that was cut by a spader the night before. Jeff just finished splicing the wires back together and was reburying the cable when Herbert asked, "Do you need any help, sonny? You know...with *The Garden*."

Every time Jeff Berry was gardening outside, Herbert offered to help him maintain the gnome. Jeff suspected that the old man wanted to become the new leader of Ivesborough's garden network.

Jeff Berry stood up. "I'm all good! Thanks for offering though."

Mr. Berry enjoyed being the *Garden* service provider for the community, and he wasn't ready to give it up yet. Whenever a new resident moved in, he would help them get connected to the gnome. Jeff rather enjoyed being the one person that everyone in town knew.

His work on the cable done, Jeff bid farewell to Herbert and walked inside his house. He closed the door to his computer room and turned on his desktop. Jeff analyzed the cartoon



flowers displayed on his screen and typed the appropriate passcode to enter *The Garden*. The passcode prevented non-Ivesborough residents from connecting to his gnome. One can never be too careful. After Jeff typed in the password, he was greeted by a familiar sight. The homepage Jeff had created was decorated with flowers. On his screen were Ivesborough notices and neighborly discussions.

“Free eggs at 42 Kumquat Lane!” one message read.

“Remember, dead leaves are great for composting!” herbert1959 (his neighbor) had posted on the forum. But Jeff wasn’t interested in reading about the community today, he needed paint for his gnome. It was getting a bit rusty.

In a minute, Jeff had navigated to Huckster. He was in the process of finding the address for a paint salesman who was selling a can of red paint for \$15 when something unusual happened. A window popped up on his screen with text that read,

This is the FBI! You have been caught! Please await instructions.

Jeff Berry ran outside. He must have been shopping for paint a long time because the sky was dark. Jeff was certain that his server was safe from government hackers. When he realized that spaders occasionally wired into networks and tried to find the creators of town servers, he made a secure passcode for Ivesborough that changed every time someone connected to the gnome. The townsfolk had to understand the secret behind the cartoon flowers in order to log into *The Garden* through his gnome. He had heard horror stories of clever spaders forcing villagers to rat out the person who created their server or router. Arresting everyone involved with *The Garden* was impractical, so the FBI only sought to jail the creators of town servers. Jeff Berry debated running off into the night as if that would make his problem disappear. Instead, he slowly walked back inside. Ivesborough needed him. The whole community was connected through the forums he created. The entire town relied on *The Garden*. Jeff couldn’t let it all disappear, he had to outsmart the FBI—but how?



By the time Jeff Berry got back to his computer room, a new message had appeared on his screen.

Who created your server? Reveal the creator's username and you will not be penalized.

Despite the horrifying circumstances, Jeff appreciated being called *the creator*. It made him feel like a deity. Suddenly, Jeff had a brilliant idea: he would reveal his username. After all, the spader said he wouldn't be punished if he revealed the creator of the server!

This, of course, was ridiculous. Jeff pictured a purple-faced lawyer trying to argue that Mr. Berry was innocent of the charges laid against him.

"Y—your honor, the FBI assured Mr. Berry that they would not arrest him if he besmirched himself and admitted to committing this heinous crime!"

No, on second thought, revealing his part in the community garden was a bad idea...*but*...he could frame someone else.

Jeff ran outside and leapt behind a shrub. He suspected that a fake landscaping van was circling Ivesborough in search of suspicious activities. Luckily, his shrub was thick and healthy unlike some of his neighbors' and it hid him perfectly. Jeff rolled onto his back and looked at the inky black sky. When he was talking to Herbert that morning, Jeff Berry would never have guessed that he would frame him for conspiring against the welfare of local business.

Jeff heard the crunch of gravel under tires. He steeled himself and peered around his perfect shrub. Sure enough, a large white van rolled slowly past his house.

"Fiddlesticks! It's Landscapers Anonymous." he cursed under his breath.



Once the sound of the van died away, Jeff leapt out from behind his hedge and hopped awkwardly toward his gnome in an attempt to not crush his Azaleas. When Jeff reached his gnome, he hit it with his shoulder. The 6-foot tall garden ornament fell off its feet and crashed into the road.

“You really need a new paint job.” Jeff said to his aluminum friend before falling to his knees to cut the cable that sprouted from the gnome’s feet.

“Aaargh!” Jeff shouted as loudly as he could without waking the neighbors (which was not very loud at all). He forgot his shears which he needed to cut through the cable! Mr. Berry sprinted back through his garden as quickly as he could (without damaging the flowers of course), grabbed his shears, and ran back to the gnome.

Quickly, he cut the cable attached to the gnome and began rolling it down the street. Streetlights illuminated patches of the road; everything else was dark. Jeff’s heart was in his throat as he rolled the garden gnome down Kumquat Lane. *Half the neighborhood will be awake* Jeff thought as the rolling aluminum echoed off of the brick homes around him.

Halfway to Herbert’s house, the road in front of him grew brighter. A car was coming up the hill toward him. Jeff rolled the gnome faster. He had to reach Herbert’s garden before the headlights revealed his gnome. Seconds before the car emerged over the top of the hill, Jeff tipped the gnome upright in Herbert’s garden and dove behind it. Peering between daffodils, Jeff saw a white landscaping van slowly drive by. Then he heard the van’s breaks squeak and a rolling door open. Murmurs and footsteps reached his ears as he lay sprawled in Herbert’s flowers.

“Let’s check out this garden, it’s awfully big. Must be hiding something.”  
It sounded like they were going to search his garden again.

Jeff dug in the dirt for a moment and found Herbert’s cable. As quietly as he could, he cut it and spliced it to a frayed cable emerging from the heels of his gnome. After burying the cable, he stood up and dusted himself off. The spaders would find his cut wire if he didn’t act now.



Jeff Berry swallowed his fear and stepped into the road.

“D’you hear that?” One spader said to the other.

“Goodnight, gentlemen!” Berry called out amiably as he walked toward the two landscaper doppelgangers.

“Umm—it is good.” The taller of the two men replied, a bit confused.

“Aye, the night...g—good!” the shorter man agreed.

Jeff was pleased that he had caught the spaders off guard.

“What are you folks doing in my garden?” Jeff enquired.

“Oh, yes.” The taller man stated uncertainly. Jeff noticed that both men had tightened their grips on their spades. They both looked rather ridiculous standing in a patch of tulips with hoods pulled over their eyes and seven-foot spades pointed upward toward the sky.

“We were...landscaping.” The tall man said ominously.

“At night?” Jeff asked.

“Oh...of—of course.” The shorter man answered.

The tall man flashed his unhelpful partner an angry look, then said “Best time to landscape! Night, that is. If we worked in the day, our shadows would prevent your tulips from soaking up all of the sun!”

Jeff looked down at the crushed tulips that both men were standing on awkwardly. He had expected a dumb answer from the spaders, but the tall man’s explanation for his late-night gardening was the stupidest thing Jeff had ever heard. The tall man seemed to recognize his own idiocy and shuffled sideways into the road.

“Is it that time already?” he said trying (and failing) to feign surprise.

“I think we have the wrong house.” he continued, realizing that his first attempt to escape the situation was too feeble. Then, he turned and leapt into the *Landscapers Anonymous* van and it began to drive off. The shorter man had to dive head-first to make it into the van before it rounded the corner and disappeared into the darkness.

“Goodnight!” Jeff Berry called after the vehicle.



Back in his computer room, Berry noticed a new message on his display.

You have 60 seconds to provide the username of the Ivesborough server creator. If you don't, you'll go straight to jail, sonny!

Jeff sat, staring at his computer for an entire minute. He knew what he had to do but didn't want to do it. Finally, he typed in herbert1959. When he sent his neighbor's username to the FBI, a spader would wire into the system and use Herbert's log in information to find out his address. Then, FBI agents would dig up his garden and find a cable attached to a server and router inside a gnome. Yes, Herbert would go to jail, but Jeff Berry was tired of the old man interrupting his morning gardening to offer to take over Jeff's precious gnome. Jeff hovered his fingers, still dirty from his nighttime gardening, over the return key.

He only had thirty seconds left to incriminate his neighbor.

Jeff felt a pang of guilt. Herbert may have been annoying with his constant offers to lead the Ivesborough *Garden*, but perhaps that was because Jeff had hung on to his gnome for far too long. If he had given the gnome to Herbert years ago, he would never have been in this predicament in the first place, but that ship had sailed. Herbert had to go to jail or him. Still, he didn't believe his neighbor deserved prison for being bothersome. Jeff read the message again. He had five seconds to send in Herbert's username.

4...

3...

Jeff leapt out of his chair! He noticed something peculiar about the message.

2...

How could he have missed it?

1...

Jeff slammed his hand down on the return key!



The fan on his computer stopped running. All was quiet.  
A new message appeared on his screen.

Thank you for your input! We will look into herbert1959.

In the morning, Jeff Berry stepped outside with a packet of seeds in his hand. He needed to replant some of the flowers that the spaders crushed the night before. The sky was cloudless, and his garden was damaged, but Mr. Berry was in a good mood. Working in his garden, he felt just like any other Ivesborough resident. In a way, it was nice to not be responsible for *The Garden* anymore. Besides, Herbert would be ecstatic now that he had the gnome.

“Jeff!” Herbert called out, beaming. “Thanks for the gnome!”

Herbert was once again navigating his way through Jeff’s garden. The old man went down on one knee once he reached the spot where Jeff was planting.

“Thanks again, sonny!” he whispered. “I think I’ll make a new community forum that is dedicated to gardening!”

Jeff Berry was happy that Herbert was so excited in his new role, but he had to clear something up before the man returned to his own garden.

“I know what you did.” Jeff whispered to Herbert.

The old man’s smile disappeared. “Really? What gave me away?”

“Sonny. The FBI agent said *You’ll go straight to jail, Sonny!* Only you say ‘Sonny.’ I also noticed that the spaders were not expecting me when I found them in my garden. If the FBI really caught someone in this community through *The Garden*, they would have arrested anyone looking suspicious that night. And one more thing—”

“More! You thought of everything!”



“Right from the beginning, I had no idea how the FBI made it past my passcode system without spying on me which would have been impossible. My computer room has no windows or cameras. My only explanation was that someone from the inside was doing it.”

“It sounds like you were on to my plot from the beginning.” Herbert whispered.

“But if I recall correctly, you rolled the gnome into my garden before I wrote *Sonny*.”

“Yes...your right.” Jeff felt a pang of remorse. “I was going to frame you for the whole thing when I thought that the FBI was after me.”

“In my defense,” he added. “I didn’t have it in me to send your name to the FBI until I realized that the FBI was you.”

Herbert smiled, “I forgive you, but can you forgive me? I was selfish. I thought I would be good at running Ivesborough’s *Garden* myself and decided you had had the gnome for long enough. My original plan was to arrive at your door shortly after I sent you the first fake FBI message. I was going to offer to take the gnome and set it up in my own garden so you could tell the FBI that I set up the server. I would then dig up half my garden at dawn and tell you in the morning that the spaders miraculously found nothing. I was walking over to your house last night when I heard the gnome clattering toward me. It let out such a racket that you didn’t hear me run back to my house. I guess you did my work for me...setting up the gnome and all. I suppose you can have it back if you want.”

Jeff Berry was quite impressed by Herbert’s plan. The FBI didn’t usually suspect that elderly folks took part in *The Garden*, so the spaders leaving Herbert alone after finding nothing would not have surprised him.

“I forgive you too!” Jeff said and he meant it. “You keep the gnome. I think you will do a great job keeping the community connected.”



“Thanks, Sonny!” Herbert was grinning as he hopped back to his own garden.

“One more thing!” Jeff shouted after Herbert.

“You’ll need to get some red paint! I’d hate for your gnome to look as if it was tumbled through the streets!”