



**A Cat,
the Garden,
a Tree and Me**

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I visited the Garden Centre in Spring
and saw the Japanese Acer,
a lone tree straggly with
discoloured leaves and cheap.

So I bought it.

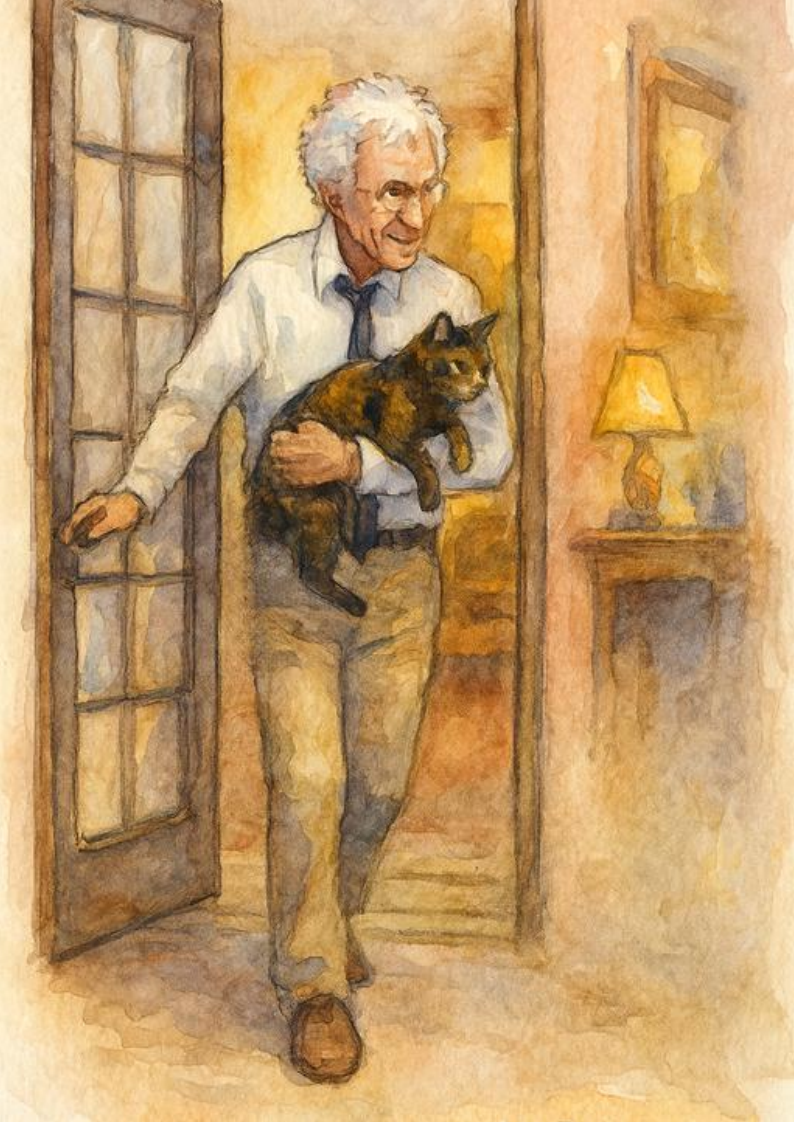
I planted it in the hard Somerset soil.



By summer the Acer was shooting
towards the starling-filled sky,
growing straight and tall with branches
reaching out in every direction.



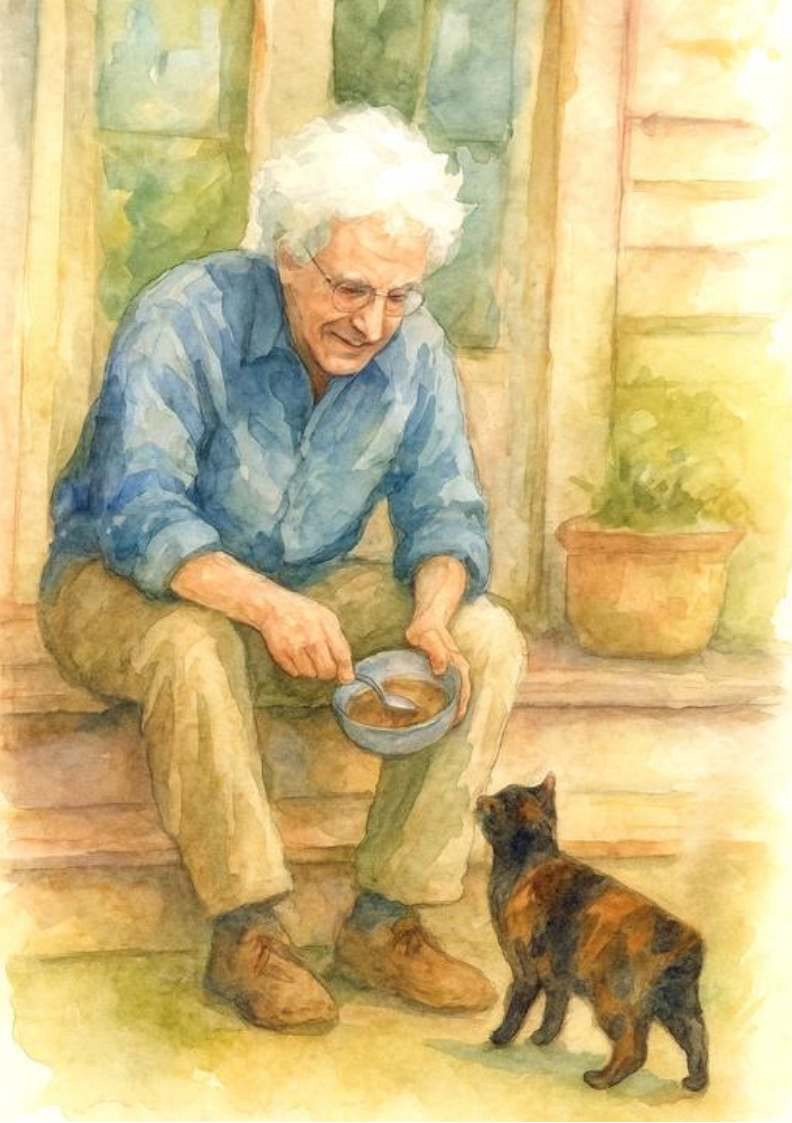
In early autumn I came across a tortoiseshell in a rusty car in a field near my allotment. Both car and cat had been abandoned. She was thin and tailless, probably dumped because of her condition as she had three kittens. Although the kittens were re-homed, no one wanted the mother.



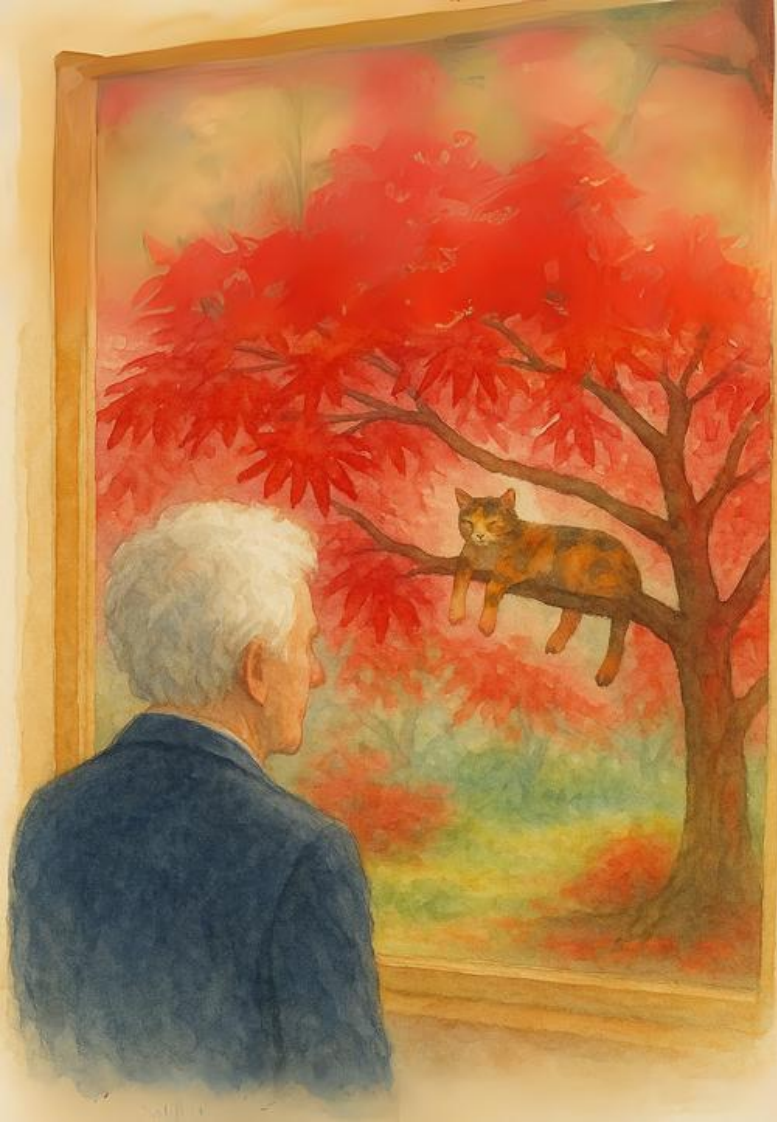
Hesitantly I took her home
and called her Mollie
after my grandmother.



Mollie and the Acer became firm friends.
She climbed it every day and never needed
a fireman to rescue her. Her tortoiseshell
coat provided a perfect camouflage.



So even though one moment she could not be seen, when her tin was banged for dinner Mollie would scramble through the leaves, jump onto the gazebo, then leap on the sundial and race across the grass to receive her reward. In an instant she changed from being a small panther to appearing as gentle as a miniature panda.



Mollie and the Acer grew up and old together. In many ways she was still a feral cat and remained untamed at heart. While she was happy to eat indoors and be fussed when it suited her, she was happiest in the garden. It was her natural sanctuary and territory.

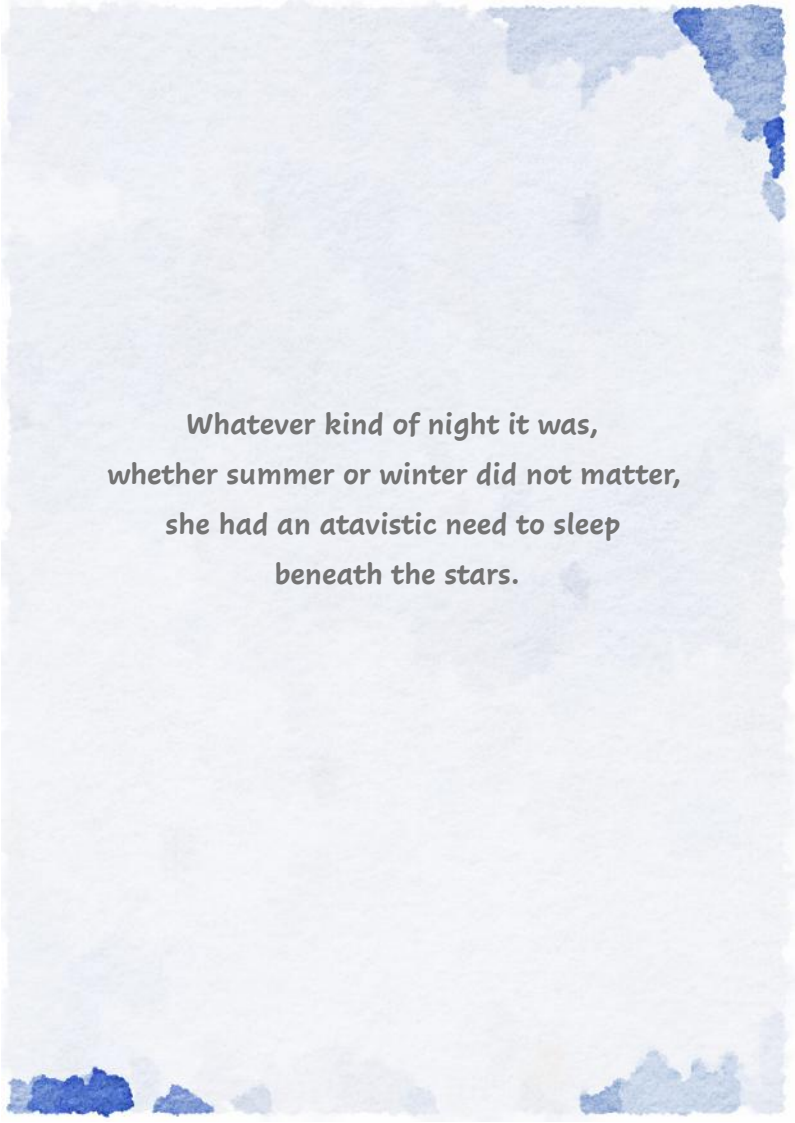


So woe betide any animal that wandered into her garden as she would hurl herself at a cat or dog or a hedgehog with such fury the trespasser was glad to escape.



Night after night she would lift her
right paw, point to the door and go out.

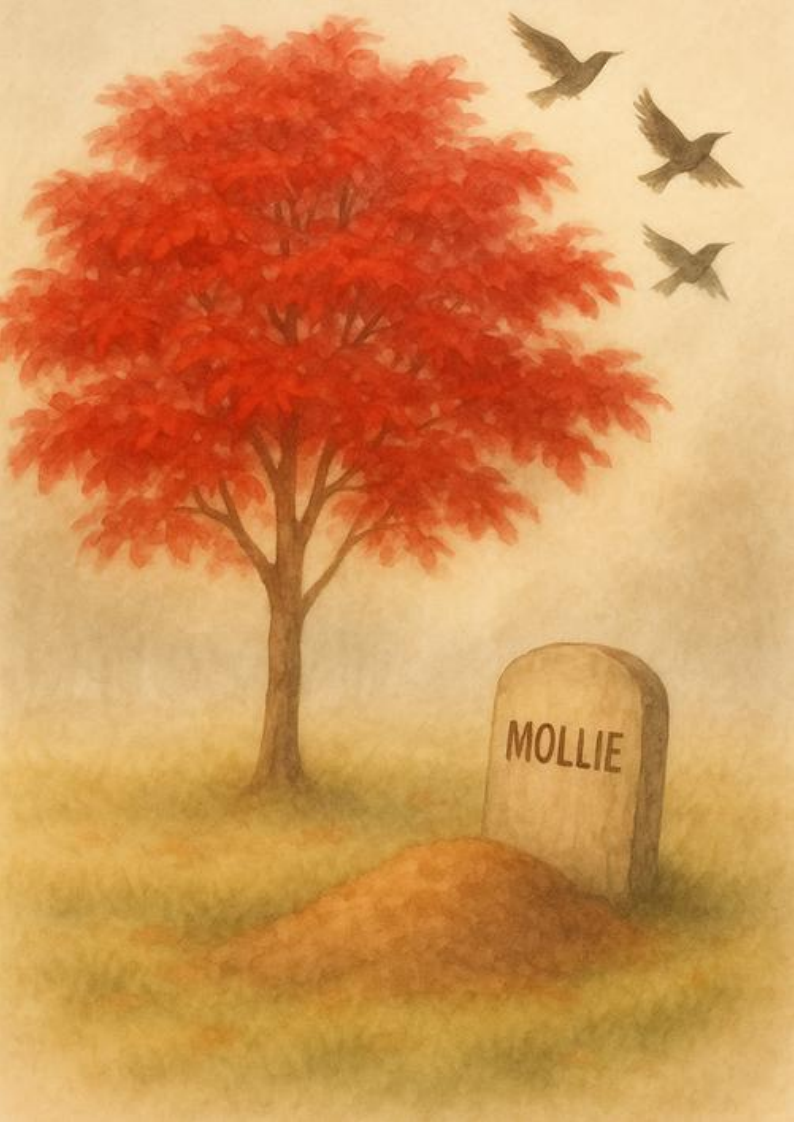




Whatever kind of night it was,
whether summer or winter did not matter,
she had an atavistic need to sleep
beneath the stars.



We are often blind to truth until it is too late. Mollie suddenly grew thin and frail before my eyes. One day she looked at me with pleading eyes and howled such that it all but reached my soul. Voltaire was right in recognising his cat's soul was the same as his own. With a heavy heart that was quietly breaking, I took her to the vet. I never saw Mollie alive again.



I brought her home. Wrapped in her old favourite chewed blanket I buried her beneath the Acer. Her grave was stained with rain and sprinkled with my tears.



Now I close my eyes and see a link
between an abandoned cat, an unruly
garden and a thirsty tree. The life-rings
and roots of each one match and reach
my own. Long after my bones have
grown cold they will find a route to
Mollie, the garden, the tree and me.

The background is a soft, artistic watercolor wash. It features a central white area that fades into various shades of light green and sage. The edges are irregular and textured, with some darker green spots and a slightly mottled appearance, giving it a natural, organic feel.

**Hands are made for reaching and
hearts are made for teaching.**