



**Small Towne Short Stories**  
*Mansur Motors and The Potting Shed*  
By Amber Montgomery

Saturday, September 19, 1936

As he pulled into the lot on Atchison and Chapman, Stanley Mansur pulled up his suit jacket sleeve to expose his watch—7:50 a.m.

He looked across the way at the Santa Fe Depot. He could see a few people on the platform waiting for the train. They were probably off to see relatives for the weekend. A young woman stood along the side of the building, holding hands with her son.

He thought of when his son Vernon and daughter Margaret were that age. How he missed taking them on trips to the beach or camping, when everything was a wonder to them. He blinked a few times and turned his gaze back to the car lot.

The lot was small, packed with new and used models buffed to a high shine.

He could see the sales team chatting and working to get the lot ready. This included Vernon who was 20 years old and had recently started working in sales. He had arrived a little early this morning.

Dressed in his usual suit and tie, briefcase in hand, Stanley strode up to the lot.

A few salesmen shouted, "Good morning, Mr. Mansur!"

Stanley waved.

"Good morning, Dad." Vernon said, with a few papers in one hand as he ran the other over his dark straight hair. He looked like his mother, Stanley thought.

"Good morning, son. Got here early?"

"Yes Sir, about an hour ago. Just wanted to make sure everything was in order."

"Excellent. Remember to push the '33 sedan."

"Yes, Sir."

He entered the mechanic's garage. The room was spacious with high ceilings and smelled of gasoline and motor oil just as a garage should. As his employees greeted him with a smile and a nod, he strolled through a doorway that led into the showroom.

The ceiling was shorter in here and it was adorned with a small chandelier in the center. Three new Ford automobiles were angled towards a center aisle of the room so as to greet customers walking in the glass front doors. There was a Persian rug on the floor and a small guest table in the corner. He looked at the huge display windows that covered the storefront as the cars passed by.

It felt like home. It *was* home.

He acquired this building from Doty Chevrolet three years ago. He had always liked this corner. The dealership had moved from a couple of different buildings on West Chapman – this was the automobile side of the Plaza. Insurance brokers, parts and repair shops, and other dealerships lined the street.

Bathed in morning light, the brand new Ford model 68 stood out among the others. He walked around it peering down the apple green glassy finish from an angle as he pulled a small cloth out of his pocket and buffed a fingerprint out of the wave-like wheel well, before moving to the chrome V8 symbol that crowned the grille. He wasn't satisfied until he could see his reflection.

He drew a deep breath and looked around. New Ford parts lined the wall facing the windows from floor to ceiling. Walking into the office, he laid his briefcase on the desk.

As soon as he sat down his secretary burst in, interrupting the momentary silence he had realized existed only in his own mind.

"There's a message for you, Mr. Mansur."

He cleared his throat.

"Good morning Ms. Mack," he smiled. "What is it?"

"A Mr. and Mrs. Dunsmeier from Beverly Hills will be coming into the showroom today at noon. They want to see the new models."

"Just fine. Thank you Ms. Mack. Please let the sales team know."

"Yes Sir," she said in a wispy voice as she turned on her heel and exited as quickly as she had entered.

Stanley was used to out-of-towners stopping in to look at the new models. His patrons were mostly local farmers and businesses, but police and government officials also came to his shop to make a deal, and Stanley was happy to oblige. There were few organizations that he didn't participate in, and he just about always supplied the automobiles for the town's parades and fundraisers.

He was raised next door in Santa Ana. His father Ozro had long worked for the Santa Ana Valley Irrigation Company and was also well known in Orange. Stanley's first job was at the Knox and Stout motor agency in 1912. A few years later, when they opened up a spot in the Plaza, Stanley was promoted to Manager. He set his sights on owning his own dealership, which he eventually gained with the help of his father.

One day he hoped to pass this on to Vernon when the time came.

He set to work for the day, greeting customers and making phone calls, and drafting a new ad to go in the Sunday issue of the papers.

The next few hours blew by. Looky-loos trickled in and out of the showroom. One couple that Vernon was helping, stood in front of one car a long while, talking and asking questions, then sitting in it with their brows furrowed, nodding at Vernon's every word. Vernon humored them although he had a hunch they were just there to have something to do, not to buy anything. That was the nature of the business and he knew he had to get used to it. Meanwhile the other members of the sales team were doing well and managed to sell two of the used cars on the lot that morning – one of them was the '33 sedan. Vernon kept missing the serious buyers.

When Mr. and Mrs. Dunsmeier's cab finally arrived, Stanley was ready to make a sale. Something in his gut urged him to pull Vernon in on this one.

"Welcome, Mr. and Mrs. Dunsmeier, I'm Stanley Mansur, the owner. This is Vernon, one of my sales associates and also my son."

Vernon extended his hand which Mr. Dunsmeier met with a firm grip.

"I'm Kip, this is my wife Irma. Why don't you show us what you've got," he said with a stern look.

He was forty-something with a thin face and a sharp widow's peak that was neatly combed back.

*This one might be tough*, Vernon thought.

Irma was several years younger than Kip. She was fashionable although she stood expressionless as she hung on Kip's arm in her skirt suit, hat, and mink stole.

He led them around the showroom, introducing them to a few of the models. The Woodie Station Wagon, the Sedan, the Coupe. But Vernon had a good feeling that what this couple needed was something they hadn't shown anyone yet.

Vernon led the group out to the car lot where the beautiful black Club Cabriolet was waiting.

Vernon gave them the tour of all of the features the new model boasted with knowledge and ease, and then he opened the driver's side door.

Stanley watched.

"Vernon, why don't you take them for a ride and show them what the car can do?" He said with a grin.

Mr. Dunsmeier, with keys in hand, eased into the leather seat and felt the smooth steering wheel in his hands. Mrs. Dunsmeier scooted in and Vernon was the last to squeeze into the two-seater. In a minute they were off.

By the time they returned to the lot Mr. and Mrs. Dunsmeier's faces had transformed. They were all smiles, although they looked a bit tousled thanks to the convertible roof. Vernon looked tousled too.

Without missing a beat, Vernon politely helped the couple out of the car.

"Well, Mr. Mansur, we'll take it!" Kip chuckled. So did Irma.

Stanley shook his hand and led him back inside to the offices. He nodded to Vernon to close the sale. Vernon quickly obliged.

They waved as the couple drove away in their shiny new toy.

Vernon put his hands in his pockets. He felt proud.

"Great job, son. You sold your first car," he said with a pat on the back.

As he turned and looked at the showroom and at his son, he saw the potential - a glimpse of the future for Mansur Motors.

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Saturday, September 17, 2016

As he pulled up to his parking spot off Chapman and Atchison, Jack Carlisle looked at the clock on his dashboard—8:00 a.m.

Jack got out of his car. The late summer morning was sunny but crisp. He stuffed his wallet and iPhone into the back pocket of his khaki shorts, straightened his green V-neck and removed a flat of tiny succulent plants from his trunk.

He balanced the box as he strode across the street, his flip-flops slapped slightly as he approached the patio of The Potting Shed. *Bip-bip*. He set the alarm on his car.

The breakfast crowd had already rolled in to the Ruby's Diner at the Orange Train Depot and a few cars were in the parking lot. He saw a couple in a minivan unload their three kids. He heard one of them shout, "I want pancakes, Mommy!"

He smiled at them as he unlocked the black iron gate where his employee Oscar Mendez was already tending to the plants and stocking merchandise.

Potted plants lined both sides of the narrow pebble path that meandered through the corner lot. Small trees, flowers, succulents, fountains, rocks, and statues were all in attendance. Tucked to one side was a chicken coop. Further down the path, an umbrella-shaded potting table for demonstrations and workshops sat overlooking the garden.

"Morning, Oscar!"

"Good morning Jack! We got the case of olive oil and Elizabeth dropped off more post cards."

"Great. I'm gonna make the tea and fix a few displays. Would you find a place for these?" He handed the box to Oscar.

"We have the OC Wine Trolley coming by tonight, let's get some gift bags ready for that. Also, I'll be getting the pumpkins tomorrow so let's start to get things set up for the Fall display."

Oscar nodded and rushed around the corner to make sure things were polished for their first customers of the day. The fall season was starting and the locals usually flocked here for unique pumpkins and gourds.

Jack walked through the garden into the big warehouse. Antique furniture, fixtures and local artwork lined the walls with a path cutting through the collection guiding customers around the warehouse and into the gift shop.

He made a right turn into the showroom and gift shop where the warm morning light and the smell of candles and potpourri greeted him. The sound of smooth jazz

played in the background. Long communal tables were dressed with flowers, linens and flatware, as if ready for a dinner party. Every surface inside was covered with goods for sale – tea towels, vases, jams, honey, humorous fridge magnets and coasters. He straightened up the table with handmade soaps. He lifted the bar of lemon verbena to his nose and took a whiff before he moved on.

He grabbed a cloth and wiped down the glassy finished wooden checkout counter. An old 1940s truck door mounted on the brick wall behind it read “The Potting Shed” in hand painted letters.

He took a moment to look around and make sure everything was in order. This place was special to him. Every time a customer walked in, it was like they were walking into his living room, kitchen, and backyard.

He had first set eyes on the vacant former car lot and showroom in 1991 when he moved to Orange from North Carolina. He had his bachelor's degree in horticulture and landscape design and had just started working at a local garden store. But he had bigger dreams. He wanted to go into business for himself and make a place of his own. But the corner found one owner, then another. Years passed as he patiently waited, saving his money and hoping he could find a way to fulfill his dream.

One day, a garden store opened there. Jack asked if he could be one of their vendors for plants and housewares. He slowly became more and more invested in the company. When the owners decided to go out of business, Jack, along with his partner Luis Sardinias, seized the opportunity to lease the building and turn it into their own space.

The Potting Shed by Carlisle had now been open for three years, and Jack had made the place with a purpose. He incorporated more housewares and dedicated many sections to local art and food. He also wanted to make sure he was generous with this place he had waited so long for by using it as a space to host fundraisers and support local charities and organizations.

His first customers came into the showroom and their chatter broke his silence. As he set to brew the Berry Bliss Yerba Maté tea for sampling, a few more people trickled in with plants in-hand.

He greeted the woman with a pot of tarragon and thyme cradled in one arm and rosemary, sage and lavender in the other.

“Good morning, Anna!”

“Mornin' Jack!”

“You all set?”

“Yep, I think so. I meant to pick these up yesterday. I am using them for a centerpiece. I'm having a ladies' tea and I thought these herbs would be perfect.”

Jack rung her up and she went on her way. The day continued much the same way with new and familiar faces dropping in for a chat or plants for their gardens.

Around dusk a diesel engine pulled up to the big roll-up side door. The wine tour had arrived. Jolly visitors poured out of the old trolley and into the warehouse. This wasn't their first stop. As they wandered around the patio, they took deep breaths of the cool early evening air. One man checked the price tag of a garden statue by the entryway while his wife surveyed an antique outdoor dining set. The whole place was noisy with chatter and laughter.

Jack played the perfect host, handing out samples of this and that with a smile. But they flowed around, admiring the gardens and laughing about how this and that was "just like the one grandma had."

After 15 minutes, a man on a Segway came rolling into the warehouse. "Trolley is leaving, I need to end the night with about 90 percent of you as I picked up," he joked as he zoomed through the warehouse and out to the patio, herding the tourists.

As they exited, Jack and Oscar saw them off and wished them a good night. Just as the trolley pulled away, Luis' car pulled up at the side.

He came over to help Jack close the store for the night. Jack was delighted and thankful for the extra support. They each quietly set to their tasks, locking the doors, counting the cash drawer, and cleaning up for the next day.

Jack walked into the garden to turn the lights off. It was so beautiful with the incandescent stringed bulbs above. The tree branches gently swung in the breeze, and the sound of cars rushed by on their way to the Saturday night scene at the Plaza. It was pretty perfect, he thought – better than he had dreamed.

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