

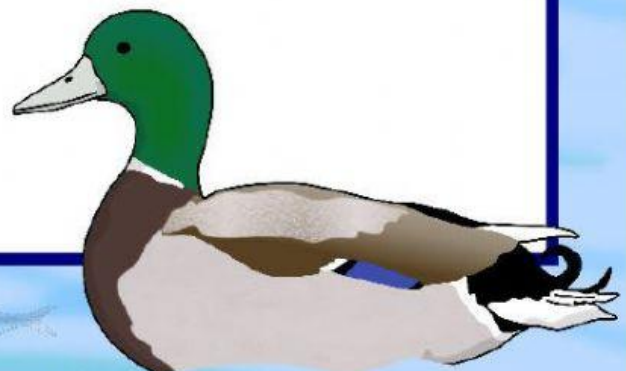
# The Secret Lake

by Karen Inglis

## Chapter 1: The Gardener

Tom's face felt so hot he was sure it was about to explode. The midday sun beat down mercilessly on his back, and the beads of sweat that had long since formed on his forehead began to itch and tickle. But still he dug on. Surely if he kept going there would be a sign. A tuft of silky fur perhaps? A distant squeak? Or (and this really would be the best!) a pair of tiny eyes squinting blindly up towards the daylight.

He paused to wipe the trickling sweat with the back of his wrist, then lifted his spade for what felt like the one hundredth time - just as a dark shadow loomed up from behind. A familiar chill travelled down his spine as, with heart pounding, he swivelled round to meet the piercing stare of the gardener, Charlie Green.



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