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THE LONELY LITTLE TABLE by Dave Hawkins

Every day was a happy one for the little table. He would sit out on the patio of a nice house with a beautiful garden, waiting for visitors to come. And come they did. First would be the dog who would sniff to see if there was anything on the table-top worth eating. Next, the magpies would fly in to sit and sing their songs. Then the cat would lie down in the shade beneath him and go to sleep. Best of all, the little table liked afternoons when the children finished school. They would sit on chairs around him; have drinks and snacks while they chattered away excitedly. Sometimes, they would even play games on him. The little table thought himself very lucky to have so many friends and he couldn't imagine a time would come when he would be the least bit lonely.

Then, one day, the family he lived with decided to move to a new town. A big truck arrived and all the furniture was brought out of the house and stacked neatly in the back. The mower and tools from the garden shed were taken too, as were the toys around the patio. The little table expected it would soon be his turn, but nobody came to collect him. When the truck drove off, the little table thought he had been forgotten. And he almost was until one of the children came out onto the patio and found him sitting there. They tried to fit him in the car, but he was too big. "We'll have to leave it," said father. Hearing this, the children began pleading: "We can't leave our table, Dad! Isn't there some way to take it?" So, after some thought, it was decided to tie the little table upside down on the roof-rack of the car.

Even though he was on his own and standing on his head, it was fun for the little table. He had never travelled so fast before, nor had he seen so many different places; and it was exciting to think that he would soon be on the patio of a new house where things would continue to be as happy as they always were.

Unfortunately, something was wrong! The rope holding the little table to the roof-rack had started to come untied. Before long, the rope had dropped off completely and the little table had started to slide backwards. In the past, the little table had

been content just to listen to people and never thought the day might come when he would need to talk to them. Now, he wished he could not only talk, but also shout. Then he could have called out: "Stop! Help me - I'm falling off!"

But even if he had been able to speak, no-one in the car would have heard. The windows were all closed and, anyway, the wind rushing past was far too loud. It was strong as well, so strong that a sudden gust picked up the little table and blew him right off the roof-rack. Up and away he sailed and came crashing down in a clump of bushes at the side of the road. From there, he could see the car driving off up the road. Surely, his family would realise their little table was no longer with them? But the car didn't stop, and soon it had driven out of sight.

The little table could do nothing but wait for his family to discover he was missing and come back for him. In the meantime, he was sure someone or something would come along to keep him company. But no cars stopped, no birds came and he didn't see a dog or a cat all day. Finally, the sun went down and night-time arrived. By now, the little table was feeling very sorry for himself. He tried to sleep, but the headlights of passing cars kept waking him up. Then there were strange sounds of creatures he couldn't see, hooting and screeching all around him; but not one of them came to visit.

By morning, the little table was very tired and very lonely. He was beginning to believe he would be stuck there forever, all alone, never again able to enjoy visitors sitting around him, talking and laughing. He would have to make do with watching people speeding past in their cars. Then, even that changed. Suddenly, there were no more cars. The road was deserted. This would have to be the worst day in the little table's life. But, if it was the worst, it might also be about to become the best.

He could hear a truck approaching, driving slowly and stopping, driving some more and stopping again. Soon, he was able to see both the truck and a man walking beside it. He was taking orange cones from the truck and placing them in a line down the middle of the road. The little table wished as hard as he could for the man to come over to visit, but he was so busy he didn't seem to have time to look. Then, he turned, stared and scratched his head. "Well," he said to himself as he started walking towards the little table, "What have we got here?"

Pulling the little table free from the bushes, he set it down on the dirt beside the road. Then he called out: "I reckon it's time for a tea-break." In moments, the man and three of his friends were sitting at the little table, talking and drinking tea. It was

almost as good as it used to be until the men went back to work. Sometime later, however, they returned with two more friends. It was while the six men were eating their lunch around him that the little table heard the best of news. The men had so enjoyed being able to sit at a table for their breaks that they decided to take the little table with them.

From that day on he went everywhere with the men as they worked on the roads. Apparently, lots of roads needed work, and they were all in different places and the little table got to see them all, far more than he would have seen if he hadn't fallen off the roof-rack of the car. And there were always lots of men doing the work who needed to take lots of breaks for morning tea, lunch, afternoon tea, and a hundred other reasons. And, of course, when they took their breaks they sat around the little table enjoying themselves.

The little table was happy again. He had found a wonderful new family; and he was never lonely again.