

## gardening for my father

He was out in the garden when it happened.

No one was sure why it was that day, and not any other. It was as if the soil knew, as he dragged his rake through it once more.

The day was sunny, with only a few clouds in the air. It was around noon, but not too hot that he needed water outside - he was only supposed to be out for about a half hour.

He had been walking between the rows, looking for bugs, lightly trailing his rake to take out the young plants that he would then put in the compost.

Something about the garden gave him a deep sense of place, every time. It may be that he grew up around them, that's what most people would say, but there was something deeper about his connection that he felt couldn't be explained by his upbringing alone.

That day, this connection was stronger than usual, and he was lightly smiling the entire time, walking between the rows with a sense of purpose and belonging.

It was a Sunday, and so there wasn't too much traffic, just a few people who were going down the highway on their way to church, in whatever form it may take. The birds sang clearly over their soft rumble, and he paused to take a moment and look around.

The first thing he noticed was that the fence was gone.

What's funny, though, is that his reaction surprised him more than the fact it wasn't there.

For he simply smiled, knowing that today was the day, even though he had never anticipated it, never thought it, and certainly intended for the fence to be there to stay.

Second, he noticed the prints his shoes left in the soil were gone.

That, also, was new. Usually when he walked in the garden he left a mark in the soil.

But there were none to be seen, and, to his moderate surprise again, he was unfazed.

Rake in hand, he stood, looking over the area, onto the freshly unveiled trees that had been growing on the other side of the fence, looking at the soil, at the grass, at the sky.

After a few moments, he felt something move over his bare feet.

This was not startling in the least. It's happened before.

But...this time was different. In fact, if he thought about it, deep down he had expected it for a long while.

He looked down.

There sat the quiet row of carrots he had been tending to, and they didn't seem like they were causing any trouble.

He turned his attention to his feet.

They tickled. He couldn't see what was causing this tickling, but they tickled. He didn't itch them. He continued watching, rake in hand, standing in the soil barefoot, breathing evenly in the midday sun.

After a while, he realized that the tickling was, actually, pieces of his feet being taken away.

He exhaled, relieved, and crouched down to see what was going on.

Looking very closely at his feet, he saw small, small insects nibbling away at his skin.

He smiled as he watched the process.

After a while of crouching, he sat down.

And as if on queue, many more small creatures came from the soil to say hello.

He saw beetles,  
larvae,  
worms,  
centipedes,  
and some woodlice.

Not only that, but small tendrils started to crawl over his skin, and he felt like he had his own site on the internet.

He laid the rake to his side, and the wood was almost immediately in a state of decay, as life erupted from where it touched the earth, there to bring it home.

Turning to look back at his feet, he realized they were gone, with only tiny bones lying in their place, quickly being taken underground, as well.

There was no pain, there was no feeling of patience or impatience, there was no feeling at all except for a slight thought about what his son would do. But that thought left soon, replaced by a feeling that everything would be just fine, no matter what happened.

His calf bones lay on the ground, larger than those of his feet.

His hands that had been propping up his torso were no longer,  
and he was propping himself up with his wrists,  
then his elbows,  
until he was lying down.

The bright blue sky above seemed as tangible, as solid, as the ground on which he lay,  
and he wondered where, if anywhere, his soul would go.

The delightful tickling sensation was everywhere now, excluding his head.

He felt things slow down. One could say they were going a snails pace, he thought,  
smiling to himself, glancing at the snails oozing towards him over the soil.

They were always the last ones to the party.

Only a few thoughts remained as the tickling reached his head.

They were:

*Where am I going?  
How come I didn't read about this?  
Will I be remembered?  
Does any of this matter?*

Upon reaching this final question, he exhaled one last time.

In a matter of minutes, there was no trace that anyone had been tending the garden.

The caretaker of the earth shone brightly down,  
almost knowingly.

His son walked out.

“Dad?”

Upon seeing the fence had disappeared, he, too, realized that today was the day.

And so he gathered a few things,  
and walked out the door,  
making sure to turn off all the lights and such beforehand.

He didn't lock the door.

Looking over the garden, he saw one small bone that protruded slightly from the soil.

It was disappearing, bit by bit, but there was still time to go over and grab it.

Upon pulling it out, he saw the fence again,  
as well as footsteps in the garden that stopped right where he was.

Unperturbed, he left, bone in hand.

He started walking down the hill to Victoria Street,  
and once there, made his way towards Guelph.