

# I betrayed the sparrows

## GREEN THUMB

**I** AM NOT BLESSED WITH a green thumb. I have murdered even spider plants.

Once strapping young clipings lovingly trimmed by my mother would wind up in my apartment with calcified white roots groping pathetically toward the thimbleful of slimy water at the bottom of the rooting tube.

Plants cringe in my presence. Until I "settled down" the only fauna to thrive in my home was the mould on the underbelly of a forgotten brick of cheddar at the back of the fridge.

My partner is a maniacal gardener. In February she is prone to staring out the window at the barren landscape of our backyard and sighing deeply, yearning for the day she can venture out with potash and pansies. This winter was a terrible tease for gardeners of her ilk. The warm weather lured her outside on more than one occasion, to poke around the sod, to prune the butterfly bush or shape the dormant sand cherry. She just couldn't help herself. In March these earth addicts are further encouraged to wallow in their peculiar sickness when Canada Blooms comes to town.

I have been dragged to Canada Blooms on two occasions. Both were unspeakable experiences.

This year I was not invited back.

"You get bored," she accused, to which I had no plausible rebuttal. It's true. I do get bored. Stupendously bored. I erupt into face splitting yawns while waiting in line to view the latest, greatest water feature. I would happily wait in line for many things, for tickets to a play, for instance, for food of any description, for a bathroom stall, but to wait in line to look at a cascading faux river meandering through 100 different varieties of hearty moss? No — never.

I refuse to wait in line for that. I would rather find a bench and eat an over-priced Hagen Daz ice cream bar, falling into a comatose state of listlessness while Loved One views the mosses. And so it is that I have revoked my Canada Blooms privileges indefinitely. And I am much relieved.

Now is the season of all gardeners. My partner and others of her kind are twitching in excitement. We cannot drive past a garden centre without stopping, or at least, without entertaining the notion of pulling over "just to see what they have."

The flowerbeds have been prepped for planting since mid-April. They have been re-shaped, as they are every year, according to some master plan of which I have

no understanding. My partner is not a linear gardener. I once "helped" her to plant a row of foxgloves. I was very proud of my row of foxgloves. She raised an eyebrow and wondered if I thought I was planting corn. When I looked over to see her handiwork — a beautiful array of blooms artfully arranged among rocks, I took her point.

When I see dirt, grass and picture rows of tulips soldiering on, she envisions an outdoor oasis, an art form. And so she sets to work, determined to make the reality live up to her high expectations. Invariably it does, and I am amazed by her creations.

My lover comes by her talent honestly. Her mother's family were all farmers. Perhaps knowledge of compost and slugs is innate, like the instinct to suckle, or fear of snakes. My mother's ancestors were domestic servants and miners. I am hopeless with an iron and could be clinically classified as a claustrophobic. So much for the nature argument.

I am a mule in the garden, offering my dumb assistance to the expert. I have become adept with a rake. This year I graduated to grass seed. I was handed the pitchfork and told how to proceed. Who knew a pitchfork figured into it? "For aeration."



**KATE  
BARKER**

"Oh," I said, pretending to understand, as I stood in a light drizzle stabbing at the earth. The conditions were perfect for reseeding.

"Oh," I said again, smiting the ground with my weapon wondering how in hell any good could come of this. Then something odd happened. At some point, during the pitch forking and the spreading of topsoil and the scattering of seeds, I got it. I became interested. I actually found myself caring about the result of all this soggy grunt work. I looked out for those seeds, watering them daily for fear of them shriveling in the heat like toasted caraway seeds.

I used to love watching the sparrows in the yard. Suddenly I found myself chasing them away, the dirty little filchers of grass seed that they are. I even sicked the dog on them, hoping she would make an improbable kill. I had become a touch maniacal myself about that lawn. The dandelions are forewarned. I have already declared war against their dormant souls. Creeping Charlie will be ripped out by hand, without mercy.

Nothing — no force of nature or man or dog will defile my new lawn, now that I have acquired the faintest taste for this strange obsession, a taste not unlike the metallic sting of blood in my mouth. I caught my lover smiling to herself when I came in, breathless from a charge upon a flock of roosting pigeons.

"What?" I asked.

"Nothing," but still, she smiled, thinking, at last, I had become one of them.