

# My Dandelion

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Whenever I walk past a freshly trimmed lawn, I have vivid memories of my parents working in the yard to keep it pristine. They would pull themselves back into the house, cocooned in sweat, dirt, and clippings of grass that narrowly avoided the bag hanging from our lawnmower. The smell of hard work and freshly groomed greenery swirled together in the house on a too-hot summer day. It was never perfect, and they would often compare it to our neighbour's yard. The line between the two was apparent to any passersby as the colours of each shifted dramatically. It was as though he took the time to individually paint each blade of grass to match the last. Always no more than three inches. He was out there all day in the summer curating the perfect suburbia in our less than suburban neighbourhood. I loved the yard my parents provided for us all the same. When I moved to my own space, it was a small basement suite. Nicer than most other options available and most excitingly, it had its own green space out back. I spent the first few winter months in wait for spring to arrive. I imagined long nights around a fire, or lounging days in a hammock or a gazebo in that yard. My very own.

The snow shifted from its icy exterior to a slushy layer which allowed more and more grass to reach out as the days went on. I found an old push lawnmower with “FREE” sprawled on a sign tucked within the spokes. This granted me the authority over my lawn, a moment of triumph. I had finally grown from a young girl admiring the effort put into owning and curating the outdoors, to being able to bend it to my own will. I could do it all. I went out and purchased seeds for my garden. I felt each individual bead inside the glossy paper packet. The image printed on it boasted a luscious flower garden that would soon pale to mine. As I scattered these into my primped garden, the heat of the sun grew stronger. The longer days and increase in the weather gave me more energy each time I stepped outside.

The summers, despite evoking images of lounge chairs and piña coladas, was busier than anticipated. I was confined to the indoors, either my home or my job, and rarely found myself enjoying the world outside. Scattered streaks of sunshine peeked through blinds to gloat at the world that was going on around me. On the day I made the trek back to my yard I found an addition to my flower garden I was not equipped to handle. The first dandelion had grown. I knew that this was a possibility. Dandelions were everywhere. Not just outdoors but placed on the sides of pesticide bottles in every garden section with red X’s photoshopped over them. But I had never seen them in my

parent's yard, or my neighbour's. When it came to yard work, they were not something that ever seemed to be a part of it. Down the street there was a house with dandelions covering it, but that was seen as an outlier. Someone who didn't put the work in, and so they didn't get the beautiful lawn they deserved. I was putting the work in when I could. This shouldn't be happening.

I looked at the plant in front of me and contemplated my next course of action. Coating it with some spray felt cruel. I couldn't help but feel the burning sensation it would cause on my own skin. Shrivelling whatever life it touched to bone. I decided on just pulling it out. Upon conception, this seemed like an easy task, but once I grew nearer to the plant, it felt like a cruel course of action. Once you look, you see that it is nothing more than a flower who had the misfortune of growing in my space. It didn't choose this spot any more than I chose to be born from the mother I was. I felt pity for this lonely sprout. Out of that pity came a compromise between the two of us. So long as the dandelion doesn't cause my any issues, I would let it be.

I mowed around the dandelion the next time I went to handle my lawn. It had a healthy patch of grass around it that grew several centimetres longer than the blades I oversaw. Each glance at my dandelion brought me back to a time of childhood. Making flower crowns and blowing seeds when

they finally bloomed. I truly began to love this blossoming presence and wanted nothing but the best for it. Seeing it as I walked to my car and back, whenever I would take out the trash or check my mail. It was a pleasant constant in my small spurts of outdoor time. Growing taller and brighter each day. The inevitable fate of my flower was that it would begin to seed. I had accounted for this eventuality, deciding that once it got to this point it would be fine to pull. This to me felt like an honesty I could be content with. Convincing myself that it had lived a life cycle and so I had done what I could for it. As I brought my groceries in one day I saw that the flower had closed in on itself and would change soon. My hands were full of cheap reusable bags from the grocery store, too full to handle the flower now. This chore swept me indoors and I vowed that tomorrow I would go and trim the flower down. What I had not accounted for was how windy the next morning would be.

By the time I went out to handle my situation, the flower was a stump. The seeds had emancipated themselves, leaving behind an empty stem amidst the tall grass. I considered the consequences of this and had determined that I could not be so kind with the next one. Against my wishes, the natural world moves on. I had dreamt of this space, and to maintain it would mean being strict about the precise vegetation that could become residents. I considered the possibility that my parents

never saw a weed because they had handled it the way I didn't. That these plants weren't a curse ingrained into those who didn't manage the green space in front of them, but a part of the process.

The next batch of dandelions sprang up. Summer grew closer as the beginning of spring floated away. Each day was getting hotter and my energy for yard work shifted, beginning to run out quickly. Regardless, the dandelions multiplied, a small gathering taking place where soft grass once was. On a rare cloudy afternoon, I embarked with tools for pulling and plucking my yard in hand. Picturing each new bloom no differently than a hair growing in the wrong place. A pimple to be squeezed. Despite this outlook, pesticides still seemed merciless. I went on my expedition with the goal of saving my space from the invading plants I had allowed in, but not without compassion. The first dandelion I came across was much smaller than the one I had grown a tender-heartedness for. It was still new. This flower had barely felt the warm embrace of sunlight on its leaves. I forced my shovel in the dirt, loosening the plant before pulling it out completely. It laid limply in my hand, roots still clinging to what little soil it had left. I pictured myself doing this to any other creature. A small mammal with its head hanging limply over my fingers. Growing cold through tufts of fur as I ripped it from its home. So quickly going from

a blooming flower to a dead weed because I decided it was in the wrong space. Space that I had no more of a claim to than it did.

I couldn't pull anymore that day. Or that week. An image of the plants corpse still imprinted on my brain, tingling my fingers at the thought of it. The scent of fresh earth brought out of the ground was still lingering. Nostalgia of salt and soil mingling felt different on my skin than my parents. Soon enough summer came. Each time I went to the yard to try and clear out the weeds there were several more than the time before. The task itself began to seem an impossible feat. I would often remember being a child and running around my yard at home. The tickling of small blunt blades on the bottom of my bare feet. I couldn't do that here. Not only were these dandelions multiplying, but the variety of them had expanded as well. More and more of these small creatures had spikes along their stems. Even when I could manage to pull some, their roots had gone down farther than my shovel could reach. I would have to pull up the whole yard to discourage them. I was becoming more and more desperate for the lush green lawn I had dreamt the further away from it I got. The longer this space existed in my life, the more it transformed into an impossible challenge. A boulder that rolled down the hill farther than I could push it back up.

That day I ran my hand along the spout of the pesticide bottle I had reluctantly bought. It came equipped with a nozzle to accurately spray the weeds instead of the grass. This would seem considerate if the spaces filling with weeds didn't already outweigh the grassy area. I wielded the plastic bottle with a determination that I hadn't thought I could possess, never handling anything I considered a weapon before. I am still debating with myself if this changes that. I started spraying each and every plant I could find, specifically targeting the ones preparing to multiply. The soft white seeds slumped over with the pressure from the liquid poison I had coated them with. The weight I felt at this task was not alleviated. Despite that, I continued until the bottle was empty. I went inside, wracked with guilt over the destruction I had caused.

The next day I went to examine the carnage. However, the reality of the little progress I had made became clear. While many of the flowers were wilting away, there were just as many growing in new places. A realization filled me until it was the only thought that could pass through my mind. No matter what I did to their yard, the weeds were not planning on leaving. I saw my barely sprouting garden surrounded by a barbed wire fence topped with yellow and white buds. The grass that I had excitedly mowed eons ago was sparse and brown. My yard had become a jungle I couldn't contain. Slowly, I conceded to the

plants around me. As summer slowly came to an end, I stopped trying to convince myself there was something to be done.

The yard is now an oasis to insects and animals that had been seeking a space untouched by humans. I see more bees and ladybugs flying passed as fall inches closer and closer. Jays and woodpeckers lined my fences hunting these very insects. Currently there is a young snowshoe hare hiding under a particularly large dandelion as its mother gathers food. So quickly this space transformed. Once a place I aspired to care for. An idyllic image of late nights and early mornings. I once pictured fires and gardening. These fantasies no longer belong to me. I have been demoted to a voyeur. Sitting back and watching as the creatures work and prepare for the harsh winter to come. They have more determination than they will ever know, and I will ever possess.