

Only Eve

by

Benn Stebleton

This garden was simply unbelievable. And it was mine. Well, ours. Mine and Elizabeth's. It certainly did not occur on its own. Thousands of dollars—tens of thousands of dollars—and hours upon hours of primarily immigrant labor were put into my backyard. I'm sorry, *our* backyard.

To step out our back door was to cross into a single serving utopia.

Let me tell you about the grass. This lawn was the green out of a crayon box. In fact, I wouldn't have been surprised if people from Crayola™ might have shown up one day. They'd ask if they could get a blade or two from my back yard in order to develop a green crayon in the perfect shade of lawn. I'd admit I was expecting them, then politely turn them down. You see, I put all of that money and effort into my yard so *I* could enjoy it. If they wanted something near the perfection I had attained, they would have to invest their own dollars and man-hours. They would have to use the appropriate amount of fertilizer, spread precisely over a hybrid sod shipped in from the Pacific Northwest. They'd have to water it twice daily, the times coordinated to the sunset and sunrise. Twenty minutes after one and fifteen before the other. And never delivered with a sprinkler. Pipes were hidden along the top of the fence as well as in the earth itself. Each would deliver a gentle mist at the times I had preset. The Crayola™ people would also have to take into consideration any moisture that might have naturally occurred since the last watering. Rain was easy to account for. A rain gauge and a few calculations would give them an appropriate adjustment. Dew typically required a flat 8 percent reduction in irrigation. Then there was the turf

builder, turf massager, and turf developer. A light herbicide would be needed. The over the counter products are frequently too harsh, or just not strong enough to do the job. After years of experimentation, I discovered the correct mixture of corn gluten meal, a few drops of a heavier agricultural application, tamed down with a bit of water and apple cider vinegar and misted through the watering system was the key to an unblemished, pure lawn. Insecticide was considerably simpler. I used an extract of the chrysanthemum plant combined with a commercial product. A few standard foggers just outside the fence kept flying insects outside of my paradise.

Crayola™ probably did not have the commitment to go through all this trouble. They would never have their perfect green.

It was a green you might find in a professional designer's color wheel, if that designer was so committed to his profession to raise it to an artform. If that designer's work was of a quality that one could rip his ad out of Cosmo and tack it on a wall in the Museum of Modern Art and no one would question its positioning. If the designer was so anal about his craft that he could detect a pinhead drop of brown mixed in with the green on his palette. If he was that kind of designer, he would seek out the color of my lawn as green, ideally green.

Standing on the stone of my—sorry, sorry, *our*—back deck, one could imagine he was looking out over a deep pond in a science fiction world where the purest water was emerald. It was so inviting one wanted to dive in. But, of course, I would not allow it. Not even my wife was permitted to set foot onto my lawn. I did not invest all of this effort into it to have it stamped with a Nike logo. There was a stone path—the stones trucked in from a quarry in Ohio—that led from the deck to a sitting area in the center of this sea.

Not that my wife hadn't made her own contributions to this backyard escape. A strip of flowers lined the edges of my lawn. Each colorful blossom sprouted from topsoil colored blacker than a blind man's view in a coal mine. It was a striking contrast. Splashes of yellow daffodils, deep orange amaryllis, a mustard set into the soft red of anthuriums, a little more yellow from the

narcissus plants. It was a series of warm glimpses in the blackness, surrounding my green pond with a starry night.

Then there was the lilac bush at the back. Pale tints of purple popping out, wafting the scent of peace throughout the space.

It was a place that only Eve herself could hope to destroy.

I made it a point to sit in my creation daily. It was an ideal escape after eight hours amongst the drones in their cubicles and another two hours of still more mindless citizens clogging my drive to and from work. I preferred to be in my garden alone. Elizabeth would sometimes come out to read on the back deck, but she knew well enough to remain silent.

It was simply glorious.

Until that fucking cat broke in. I don't even know how the invasive little bastard got past the fence. It was a tall wooden fence, each slat planted deep into the earth and standing at six feet. There were no breaks between the boards, and the gate was never left open. Both Elizabeth and I were certain to keep it locked down to prevent the undisciplined brats of the cul de sac from disturbing my retreat.

Still, the damn cat managed to somehow intrude. It didn't seem to disturb anything. As far as I could tell, it just walked straight back to the shade of the lilac, lay down, and died.

I noticed it immediately after returning from work that day. When I reached the center of the yard, even before sitting on my sculpted stone bench, I saw the animal stretched out in the soft dirt. I promptly yelled at it, cursing and waving my arms to threaten it away. It did not react. After a few minutes of escalating intimidation, I began to believe it deaf. I decided I would have to draw nearer the cat to properly frighten it.

I removed my shoes and socks, raised myself onto my toes, and stepped onto my lawn. I allowed myself a moment to marvel at the softness of the grass before taking the next light step.

Upon reaching the animal I quickly determined that it was no longer alive. It was

stretched out on its furry side, eyes shut, tiny fangs popping over black lips.

Naturally, I was horrified to find this dead animal in my perfect yard. But I certainly wasn't brave enough to remove it myself. Who knew what diseases it could commute to me if I risked even a gloved touch.

I phoned my lawn service, who rejected my request for help. The barely literate guy who took my call told me the soonest they could be out was three days. Too many other projects were already scheduled. He tried to tell me some bullshit about their business not offering emergency services, which is just ridiculous. When the Mona Lisa loses her smile, you don't spend time finishing a fingerpainting.

I immediately fired my lawn service.

The city's animal control was no more help. It is their bureaucratic policy they do not remove carcasses from private property.

Despite my raging, my own wife would not assist with restoring my yard to its intended perfection.

After a rather sleepless night and long workday, I returned to my yard for my routine respite. But the cat was still there, by this time emitting an order powerful enough to compete with the lilac. Flies had found the body through my insect defenses. I was forced to leave my kingdom after only a few minutes.

This continued each day. I would venture out, observe the slowly decaying animal, hold my nose against the stench, then retreat back indoors. After a week I didn't go out anymore.

The lawn became overgrown and lost its manicure. Insects of all sorts penetrated the defenses and found their way to scavenge the rotting flesh. Without the proper fertilizer and care, the green grass faded into some sort of yellowed lime tint.

That was how my single serving utopia looked the last time I braved a look at it. That was over a year ago.

###