

A Grave Situation

Sam Roeper missed his wife something awful. Maybe it wasn't so much his wife missing that bothered him, as much as what was missing since she left. Regular meals, for one. The mass exodus of dust bunnies from under the furniture, for another. Hospital corners, pressed sheets, the smell of fresh baked goods wafting from the kitchen every weekend. Sadly, these were all things of the past since Mrs. Roeper had left. Only one thing in Sam's life had gotten better since that day: Sam's garden out back. Here, tulips bloomed, and roses, pink and fragrant, lilted in the breeze. Mrs. Roeper wouldn't have any of it when she was here. There were always too many bees a-buzzing round the peonies, sparrows dropping waste on the chair next to the bronze bird bath, marring the very idea of what she felt a garden should be.

Sam had tried to plant vegetables once, but she'd made him tear up the bed, yammering about all of the rabbits that got in. It was always something: sunflowers brought squirrels; berries brought skunks; and the composter brought raccoons.

Sam himself was not above reproach either, for he trailed dirt into the house in the treads of his shoes, left a ring around the tub when he bathed, and forgot to pick under his nails before he touched his wife.

Sam poured himself a glass of iced tea and took it outside. Whenever he felt himself missing his wife, it always helped to lose himself in the beauty of his

garden. Rather than miss his wife, he could thank her for helping him to make his yard into the sanctuary it was.

"Howdy, neighbour," Walkins said, peering over the common fence that separated his lot from Sam's. "Beautiful day, no?"

Sam took a moment to answer as he considered the beads of sweat condensing on his glass. He balanced it on the arm of his lawn chair and rubbed the moisture from the glass between his hands. "That it is," he answered, "That it is."

"Your garden. It's beautiful," Walkins commented. "The missus and I were curious to know the secret of your green thumb. If you don't mind sharing, that is."

"It's all in your choice of fertilizer. Take the one I use, for example. Works like a charm. I have it on good authority its the same fertilizer they use at the graveyard."