

Weedeater

Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is a nobler art of leaving things undone.

Lin Yutang

If one were to draw circles outward from the Qualicum Beach town hall to Bowser, one would see a gradual decline in the amount of foreign foliage in the gardens, until, deep in the heart of Lighthouse Country, you would come to old Ed's house, where not a single bulbous tulip, not one dangling impatiens, can be found. Old Ed's garden is all salal and salmonberries, dandelions and dogwood.

Old Ed, you see, was a wise builder, and when he carved his home into the rain forest, he made sure as little damage was done to the natural vegetation as possible. Today, he sits unassumingly in one of the loveliest gardens in the district, and he barely has to lift a finger to tend it.

Not everyone, of course, will follow old Ed's lead, a fact proven to me every evening as my water pressure dwindles to a drizzle. All around, gardeners are showering the land in a life-giving baptism, purifying the heathen soil to sustain their sanctified shrubs and blessed bulbs. Now believe me, I appreciate the green-thumber's satisfaction – the delight of the nurturer, the joy of aesthetic creation; I can even understand the social pressures that squeezed elemental substances into such things as leaf-blowers and riding mowers. But what is it about nature that we feel we have to improve on?

My brother, an engineer, explained it to me this weekend. When he arrived for a visit, he found me loafing about as usual, resting in the tall grass outside my unfinished house, and amusing myself by watching a cat stalking a dragonfly. My brother, older and vastly more successful than me, has certain ideas about things. But rather than tell me, he likes to show me, and this weekend he showed me a thing or two.

After enduring ten dull minutes in the grass, he stood up, brushed off his pants and got into his truck.

"I'm running up to the store," he called out. "You need anything?"

What I needed, of course, he already knew. He was gone less than half an hour, and the folks at the hardware store in Bowser are happy, because he came back with a brand-new, whirligigging weed-eater and set to my one acre of tangled weeds and brazen grasses with a fury I'd forgotten he had in him. Soon he was covered in sweat, which held in place against his body bits of feathery death that the whirling fishing line had whacked into the air.

As I watched this technologically empowered assault on the seemingly defenceless flora I knew that man would always have to shape his own world, to give it both truth and meaning. But I also knew that, in the end, nature would have its way. For even with a bottle of Nutri-Gro in one hand and a bottle of Kill-Ex in the other, feeding on industrial fruits plucked from a tree whose subconscious roots forage deep into our agrarian past, we are still unable to capture or subdue that most elusive of fugitives.

The dragonfly got away.