

The Grass

“Honey? Are you going to cut the grass today?”

“Huh?”

“The grass! When are you cutting it?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah. I will later.”

“Ok, but you said that yesterday and you know when it gets too long the lawnmower gets stuck.”

“Honey, I said I’ll cut it.”

“Ok, because I’m not buying a new lawnmower. You waited so you’ll buy it.”

“Damn it! I’m going to cut the goddamn grass!!”

Ralph lays on the couch, breathes in and out trying to calm himself, finding the whole discussion on the grass thoroughly depressing and his wife’s utter fixation on it even more depressing. His emotions on such subjects are neither hot nor cold, only a suffocating grey area, which makes him think of a lobotomized human being. All the “upkeep” of his quaint suburban home makes him feel this way. All of a sudden, seven shots ring out in the summer air. He jumps up immediately, his heart racing, like prey sensing a predator. These were no firecrackers. This was a gun.

He runs outside and sees some of his neighbors standing in their backyards looking in the general direction of the shots, staring at each other with puzzled looks

The Grass

on their faces, like children on their first day of school. His neighbor Mike walks over to his side of the fence, "You heard that?"

"Yeah!"

"Those were gunshots!"

"Oh Absolutely. I mean its not the fourth of July or anything!"

"Yeah...yeah."

"What do you think it could be?"

"I don't know. Maybe the cops?"

"Maybe..."

"Your wife didn't hear it?"

"She's taking a nap."

"Well..."

"Yeah."

"Looks like it might rain."

"Mmm hmm."

Ralph goes back inside still bewildered, yet attracted by a domineering psychological force of the latter mentioned grey area that keeps telling him to forget it, its none of his business, it has nothing to do with him or his family. He turns on the television and begins watching his favorite re-runs of *Full-House*, allowing all that "cuteness" to sedate him back into his comfort zone. A turkey sandwich sounds really good.

The Grass

While he's in the kitchen, his wife comes downstairs. Having nothing exciting to say, he returns to the seven shots. "Did you hear those shots?"

"Earlier? Yeah. Seven loud booms."

"Yeah! I think they were gun shots."

"You think? I wondered what they were, but I was so tired I just went back to bed...Ahhh it's amazing what a fifteen-minute nap can do. It really does work wonders."

Her utter unconcern, seems to revive his own. "You don't think somebody got hurt do you?"

"I don't know Ralph! Are you going to use this as an excuse not to cut the grass?"

"Fuck the grass!! Is that all you care about?"

"Don't turn this around on me just because you're too lazy to do it. It's not personal and I'm being perfectly civil."

"Yeah well your civility is colder than ice."

"Whatever Ralph. I've some practical matters to attend to, I don't have time to sit around dreaming." She leaves the house and Ralph thanks the lord for small favors.

Later that night Ralph is flipping through channels when he comes upon the local ten-o'clock news and stops dead in his tracks when he recognizes his own neighborhood. The newscaster is mustering all the concern his face is capable of as he makes his report, "Earlier today, on the 2000 block of Mulligan street, which you

The Grass

can see right behind me here, here in the city of Mapleton, a dispute among two elderly neighbors has come to an end in violence. We don't have too much information at this time, as the police are still conducting an investigation, but the 76-year-old suspect is being held for allegedly shooting his 67-year-old neighbor in the victim's backyard about seven times. A flabbergasted neighbor said that she saw the suspect shoot the man three times than go back in the house to reload and come back to shoot him four more times. The nature of the dispute is not certain, but neighbors have seen them periodically argue over the length of the victim's grass, which he supposedly allowed to get as high as 3 feet, a tragedy here in Mapleton. Back to you Bruce."

"Well as Jim said, this is certainly a tragedy...we'll be back with the always entertaining Tom Riley and the weather after this."

Ralph turns off the television and just sits there, looking like a dog that has just been shown a card trick. He can't believe it. His mind simply cannot wrap itself around the facts he has just heard. The grass? Jesus God in heaven! The grass! Just then he hears his wife come in, "Ralph! Give me a hand with these groceries!" He walks out of the family room still in a state of partial paralysis. Regaining his power of speech he tries to tell his wife. "Jesus Brenda, you know the shots we heard!" "Yeah. Grab that box of tomatoes."

"It was Roger."

"Roger? What are you talking about? Who's Roger?"

The Grass

"Jesus, Roger...the house behind us!"

"Oh yeah, yeah...what about him?"

"He shot his neighbor!"

"What!"

"Yeah."

"Come on."

"Yeah!"

"Are you kidding me?"

"No, I swear to God, it was on the news."

"What? Why?"

"The grass."

"What? Whaddya mean 'the grass'?"

"He never cut his grass."

"Well, let that be a lesson to you!"

"Brenda, are you serious? The man just died right behind us and you're turning this into a lesson for me!"

"Well I feel sorry for his family and everything, but I can see if Roger kept asking him repeatedly and he never did it, I mean year after year like he just didn't care..."

"Are you out of your goddamn mind! Its grass for fuck sake!!!"

"I'm just saying I can see how it might have happened. I mean things like that can affect your property value."

The Grass

Ralph just stood there like he was looking at the devil himself. "I gotta get the hell outta this house before I shoot *myself!*" As he went through the kitchen and opened the door to the garage he screamed back at her, "You people are fuckin IN-SANE!!"

The next day Ralph woke to the sound of lawnmowers. Looking outside, the sun shining, and the robins chirping, squirrels running across electrical wires, it was as if nothing had happened, nothing at all, like it wasn't real, a group nightmare that the whole neighborhood had had for a split second, woken up from, used the bathroom and brushed their teeth. Ralph too was beginning to forget about it, that force, that domineering sedative force...go back to sleep...lay your head down...forget about it...what's on TV?

Ralph lay on the couch, picking his nose, caught in a lazy stupor. His wife comes home from work. She takes one look at him and smirks, "Enjoying yourself?"

"Huh?"

"Well?"

"What?"

"The grass!" He looks at her for a second, wanting to say something else...

"Oh, yeah, yeah. I will later."