

THE TALL GRASS

BY

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An obsessive man can't stand it when his neighbor's grass is overgrown and he's finally going to do something about it.

EXT. SPENCER HOME - DAY

The houses line the quiet street like an unzipped zipper. This is where middle management comes home to eat, sleep and spray their lawns. The Spencer's ranch home sits at the end of the street. Birds are singing, the sun shines bright, it's a beautiful morning.

AMY SPENCER (40) her brown hair just touching the shoulders of her modest dress, holds her purse and a Bible next to the family minivan. Next to her is JENNY SPENCER (12) long ponytail, over-sized T-shirt, proud of her pink Converse shoes and BART SPENCER (10), studious. They watch and wait.

THE FRONT YARD

FRANKLIN SPENCER (40) dressed like a bigger version of his son only with product keeping his hair perfectly in place, walks through his leafless, weedless yard that he keeps at just the right shade of green. His hands behind his back, head down, searching. He has a plastic bag on one of his hands.

AMY

Franklin, come on. We'll be late.

Franklin keeps searching. Then he spots it.

FRANKLIN

Aha! I knew it!

He steps over to his find, reaches down with his bagged hand and scoops up a pile of dog poop.

He holds the bag over his head triumphantly.

AT THE MINIVAN

JENNY

Ugh. Can't we just leave him?

BART

Why does Dad get so exited about poop?

Amy sighs, opens the minivan door.

AMY

Your dad has issues.

Amy gets in the minivan. The kids follow.

EXT. MR. RICHARDSON'S HOUSE - DAY

Franklin steps up on the front porch of his neighbor's house, bag of poop in hand, and knocks. As he starts to knock again, the door opens. MR. RICHARDSON (70s) a short man with thin gray hair, thick glasses and still in a bathrobe, sticks his head out.

MR. RICHARDSON

Hello.

Franklin holds up the bag of poop.

FRANKLIN

Hello, Mr. Richardson, your dog left something in my yard and I thought you might like it back.

Mr. Richardson looks at the bag, then back to Franklin.

Franklin holds the bag out to him.

Without changing his expression, Mr. Richardson takes the bag.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

You're welcome.

Franklin turns and begins to march away then stops, looks at Mr. Richardson's overgrown lawn.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

And... if you need to borrow some gas money for your lawn mower, I'd be glad to lend you some.

Franklin marches off without waiting for a reply.

MR. RICHARDSON

Okay. Have a nice day.

Franklin doesn't look back.

FRANKLIN

You too.

(beat)

Mowing your grass.

INT. MINIVAN - DAY

Franklin gets into the minivan and SLAMS the door too hard. Amy, Jenny and Bart all jump.

AMY

Why!?

JENNY

Maybe if you close it harder,  
you'll scare the dog and it'll  
never poop again.

FRANKLIN

That's enough.

Jenny rolls her eyes.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

I shouldn't have to do that you  
know.

AMY

I know. And you don't.

FRANKLIN

What do you mean I don't? The  
man's dog is pooping in OUR yard.

AMY

Let's just go. We don't want to be  
late.

Franklin looks at her, pauses.

FRANKLIN

Did you see his yard? Again, I had  
to tell him to cut it.

AMY

Of course.

He puts the key in the ignition but it won't go in.

He pushes. He pulls. He twists. He pushes.

FRANKLIN

What is wrong with this thing?

He jerks around so hard the whole car is shaking.

Amy sees the problem. Reaches for the keys but he's thrashing  
around so much, it's like trying to catch a wet fish.

AMY

Stop.

FRANKLIN

It won't go in.

AMY  
Well, stop.

FRANKLIN  
The car won't work without the  
keys.

AMY  
Just stop.

Finally, she wrestles the keys from him. She holds them up.

AMY (CONT'D)  
You can't start the car with the  
house key.

Jenny snorts. Franklin impatiently takes the keys from Amy.

He starts the minivan and they pull out.

EXT. CHURCH PARKING LOT - DAY

Cars fill the parking lot. No people to be seen. The  
Spencer's minivan pulls in and parks. Franklin, Amy, Jenny  
and Bart get out and all sprint across the parking lot and  
into the church.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SPENCER'S HOME - DAY

The Spencer's minivan pulls into the driveway. The kids pile  
out and run into the house. Amy steps out and starts for the  
house then notices Franklin staring at something.

AMY  
What is it?

FRANKLIN  
How hard is it to keep it mowed,  
really?

Franklin shakes her head with disgust.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
You know, one of the best things  
about going to church is that for  
that short period of time, you  
aren't worried about dog poop, or  
grass, or how loud the guy across  
the street is. Even if you are  
faking it, it's nice.

A beat

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

I'm gonna talk to him when he gets home.

AMY

Oh. Don't.

FRANKLIN

It's a matter of principle. I, WE, shouldn't have to live next to that.

AMY

It doesn't bother me.

FRANKLIN

It should.

Amy sighs, walks off.

INT. DINING ROOM - DAY

The dining room looks like it was plucked off an IKEA showroom floor. Franklin and Jenny sit at the table eating lunch. Bart is playing with some action characters, an untouched sandwich sits in front of him.

FRANKLIN

Bart, eat your sandwich.

Bart pretends one of his characters is talking.

BART

The Bible says I'm free. Free to not eat tuna anymore.

FRANKLIN

The Bible says you don't have to eat tuna?

BART

That is correct.

Franklin looks to Jenny for help.

JENNY

We studied Galatians today. I think it was like Galatians 5 or something where it talks about being called to freedom.

(MORE)

JENNY (CONT'D)

Mrs. Templeton said a lot of people use that verse as an excuse to do what they want.

FRANKLIN

You think your brother is mis-using scripture so he doesn't have to eat a tuna sandwich?

Jenny shrugs. They both look at Bart. He stares back, eyes shifting between his dad and his sister.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

(to Bart)

Eat your tuna.

BART

Ah, man.

Bart puts his toys down and eats takes a bite.

Franklin looks out the window and notices a car in Mr. Richardson's driveway.

FRANKLIN

When did he get home?

He jumps up from the table.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)

Time to take care of this once and for all.

AMY

Didn't you just talk to him this morning?

Franklin is sliding on shoes and heading out the door.

FRANKLIN

I think he was still asleep or something. He didn't say much.

He bolts out the door. Amy and Jenny exchange a look. Bart slams his action figures together.

EXT. MR. RICHARDSON'S HOUSE. - DAY

Franklin stands on the porch knocking. Impatiently, he knocks again and starts to knock again but the door opens.

A YOUNG WOMAN, 19, with black short hair that matches the heavy mascara around her eyes, wearing a T-shirt that reads 'WHAT?' answers the door.

YOUNG WOMAN

Yes?

Franklin is caught a little off guard.

FRANKLIN

Oh, hello. I'm sorry, is Mr. Richardson in please?

She stares at him a beat then slowly begins to cry.

Franklin stands there, awkwardly sliding his hands into his pockets.

After a moment.

YOUNG WOMAN

I'm sorry. Mr. Richardson, Uncle Pete, passed away this morning.

She begins crying again.

FRANKLIN

Oh, I'm sorry to... Uncle Pete? Wasn't his name Bill?

YOUNG WOMAN

Not to us.

FRANKLIN

Oh. I see. Okay. We'll I'm sorry for your loss, I didn't mean to bother you.

The woman is sobbing.

She closes the door.

Franklin stands there for a moment then heads back home.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

An oversized sofa faces a large flat-screen TV hanging on the wall. A book about coffee tables sits on the coffee table in front of the sofa along with more of Bart's action figures.

Franklin comes in, slides his shoes off. Pauses for a moment, flops on the sofa.

AMY (O.S.)  
So how'd that go?

FRANKLIN  
He's dead.

Amy comes flying into the room.

AMY  
What did you do?

Franklin looks at her.

FRANKLIN  
He died earlier, while we were at church.

AMY  
Wow.

FRANKLIN  
I know.

She sits next to him. Silence for a moment.

Franklin serious.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
You know what else?

AMY  
What?

FRANKLIN  
If he died today, the funeral will probably be, what, Tuesday, Wednesday at the earliest.

AMY  
Uh huh.

FRANKLIN  
It could be next weekend before anyone gets around to mowing the grass.

Amy's jaw drops.

AMY  
You are unbelievable. Do you want me to go mow it for you?

Franklin thinks about it for a second, his face lights up.

FRANKLIN  
That would be...

Amy looks at him.

FRANKLIN (CONT'D)  
...no.  
(to himself)  
I'll do it.

EXT. SHED - DAY

Franklin is pouring gas into an old push mower.

EXT. MR. RICHARDSON'S HOUSE - DAY

Franklin is yanking and yanking on the mower. After about the tenth pull it finally starts.

We see him sweating and mowing. The mower runs into a little fat LAWN DWARF with a blue coat and red pointy hat. He knocks it over. Franklin looks around, sets it back up.

He is cutting the grass up by the house, looks in the window, the girl is staring back out at him - he jumps a mile.

Franklin rounds the corner of the house, cutting the last strip of lawn. He's sweaty and out of breath.

He kills the motor on the mower. Looks at the yard. Looks at his own yard. Smiles.

MR. RICHARDSON (O.S.)  
Fine job.

Franklin jumps. Turns. Mr. Richardson is standing behind him, leaning on a cane.

FRANKLIN  
AHHHHH!!!

MR. RICHARDSON  
I was going to get to it a little later but I appreciate the help.

Franklin stares at him for too long without saying anything. Then.

FRANKLIN  
Why aren't you dead?

MR. RICHARDSON

Pardon me?

Franklin points to the house.

FRANKLIN

The girl said you were dead.

Franklin looks toward the house, sees the girl duck away from a window.

MR. RICHARDSON

Ohhhh... yeah. My niece, Penelope. She's a bit of a nutcake. Always making up stories and such. Studying to be an actress. But we love her anyway.

A pause.

MR. RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

So that's why you mowed my grass? Thought I was dead?

He's caught and can't really say anything.

MR. RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

Well whatever the reason, I appreciate it.

Franklin can only manage an embarrassed giggle.

MR. RICHARDSON (CONT'D)

It's hard, with these knees, to get out here and do this kind of work. So like I said, I appreciate it.

FRANKLIN

Okay.

MR. RICHARDSON

Can I get you something to drink?

FRANKLIN

Noooo... I'm fine. Thanks.

Franklin steps back and trips over a large rock.

MR. RICHARDSON

Careful. I put that there as a marker for ol' Betsy. Sweetest dog I ever had.

Franklin scoots away as if he had been standing directly on ol' Betsy's dead body.

FRANKLIN  
So ol' Betsy is...

MR. RICHARDSON  
Gone about two months now. I do miss her.

Franklin thinks a minute.

FRANKLIN  
But the poop?

Mr. Richardson shrugs.

MR. RICHARDSON  
What am I gonna do? Get in a fight over dog poop? Knew you'd figure it out sooner or later. Sure you don't want a drink. You look a little... uneasy.

FRANKLIN  
No. Thank you.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Franklin enters the house, slides his shoes off, Amy sits on the sofa reading a book.

AMY  
So?

FRANKLIN  
I'm gonna take a shower. Mr. Richardson isn't dead anymore. But his dog is.

Amy looks at him strangely.

EXT. SPENCER'S HOME - DAY

The Spencer's minivan pulls into the driveway. As they get out, Amy notices Franklin staring at something. She stops, looks, sees Mr. Richardson's grass is once again slightly overgrown.

FRANKLIN  
You guys go on in.

AMY

What are you gonna do?

FRANKLIN

Looks like Mr. Richardson might  
need gas for his mower again.

Amy watches as he walks away.

EXT. MR. RICHARDSON'S HOUSE.

Franklin stands on the porch, hand in a fist, ready to knock.

He pauses. Then just turns and walks away.

As he walks away, Mr. Richardson opens the door and steps  
out.

From Mr. Richardson's POV

We see Franklin walking across Mr. Richardson's yard back to  
his own. Mr. Richardson's grass is freshly cut.

Just as Franklin gets into his yard, a DOG runs up and  
squats. Franklin tries to run it off but it's too late, the  
deed is done.

Franklin looks back and sees Mr. Richardson watching him.

Franklin shrugs his shoulders in defeat, smiles, gives Mr.  
Richardson a small wave and goes into his house.

FADE OUT:

