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## Another Night of Recycling Cans

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## Another Night of Recycling Cans

### Abstract

On Tuesday evenings I think about taking the blade from the lawnmower and bashing it into my skull. I'm not sad. In fact, there has been little despondency in my life since mother died of Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease 11 years ago. Shortly thereafter, my family and I relocated from North Carolina to a nice residential community outside Fort Lauderdale. Aside from the occasional outburst from my 9-year-old son, Samuel, for not understanding word problems in math, or an annoyed glance from my wife, Meredith, when I forget to pick up soy creamer for coffee, I feel loved. At the accounting firm, I have a secretary who buys me a nice bottle of port around the high holidays and a boss who gives me raises without my having to beg. Still, there is that lawn mower. It's right behind the newly leased Camry. Tonight, when I'm in the garage compressing cans with the contraption Meredith bought on SkyMall, I actually consider removing the blade. What fascinates me is not so much end

### Cover Page Footnote

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# BOOTH



A JOURNAL

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## Another Night of Recycling Cans

Fiction by Nick Seifert

On Tuesday evenings I think about taking the blade from the lawnmower and bashing it into my skull. I'm not sad. In fact, there has been little despondency in my life since mother died of Creutzfeldt–Jakob disease 11 years ago. Shortly thereafter, my family and I relocated from North Carolina to a nice residential community outside Fort Lauderdale. Aside from the occasional outburst from my 9-year-old son, Samuel, for not understanding word problems in math, or an annoyed glance from my wife, Meredith, when I forget to pick up soy creamer for coffee, I feel loved. At the accounting firm, I have a secretary who buys me a nice bottle of port around the high holidays and a boss who gives me raises without my having to beg. Still, there is that lawn mower. It's right behind the newly leased Camry. Tonight, when I'm in the garage compressing cans with the contraption Meredith bought on SkyMall, I actually consider removing the blade.

What fascinates me is not so much ending the mundane cycle of my existence, because I don't look at it like that at all. In fact, I like the simplicity of suburban life. What fascinates me most is the idiosyncrasy of the thing. I've never heard of anyone dying like that. You can't. A person couldn't physically swing their arm with enough force to crack the bone. Also, the body's fail-safe would interject before impact so the blade wouldn't connect. Even if you did manage to trick yourself into preforming the action, there's no guarantee. Sometimes death is certain and slow like those little prions that attacked mother. The neurodegeneration made these tiny holes in her brain

and rendered the tissue spongy. On the other hand, death can be ambiguous and quick, but that type is rarely self-inflicted. So, I'm willing to bet, my idea wouldn't work. More than likely you'd just have this scar on your head from a stupid moment in your life. At least there'd be something to show for feelings.

I like that. I like the idea of other people visibly seeing your emotions. In fact, I'd shave my head and wear the scar with pride. There'd be this high school girl scanning my soy creamer and she'd say, "That's a big old scar you got there. Did you get in some kinda accident or something?"

"Nope," I'd say. "I bashed a lawnmower blade into my skull."

I smile.

In between crushing the cans, I contemplate a future. One where I actually start a garden, build a birdhouse, run a marathon, coach Samuel's baseball team, live in a cabin for a summer, recite a rosary at mother's grave in Gibsonville, finish that Masters in Actuarial Science, and finally make love to Meredith on Dania Beach like we promised. When the contraption crumbles the last can, I relive a memory no older than a few hours instead of staying with ocean waves. I recall my last meal. Meredith was supposed to make meatloaf, my favorite, but we ate leftovers instead. Samuel finished his dinner before I'd pulled mine from the microwave.

After placing the bag of cans on the workbench, which I used exactly once for Samuel's pinewood derby, I study the lawnmower.

It's a pretty thing. A cherry body with four wheels and white rims all made of plastic. Atop the red housing sits a black engine that shows no dirt. I never minded mowing; there's something soothing in the sound, maybe because it drowns out everything else. Bending down, I tip the mower on its side to expose a long overdue destiny. Mulch and grass are stuck to the undercarriage. In fistfuls, I make small, careful piles near the Camry's left front wheel.

My mother once said, "Go to the front yard and count every blade of grass. That is how much I love you."

I remember this as the pile grows. Then I think of a kiss Meredith and I shared beneath Cinderella's castle in Orlando. I lean back for a moment, sweeping the clippings with an open palm across the cement floor.

The blade must be removed. So I walk back towards the workbench, grabbing a crescent wrench from my shiny toolbox. I don't want to waste time digging through the mess of sockets. Suddenly, it dawns on me as I kneel over the lawnmower – I haven't had a real emotion. I haven't felt anything. This whole time, I've thought mainly of logistics. Funny not to think of the impact this will have on Samuel the day he walks down the aisle with some chubby salesgirl from Sears.

Adjusting the wrench, I loosen the first, then the second mounting bolt. The second one, however, gives me some trouble. After spraying it with WD-40, it isn't a problem. To finish the job, I use my hand to completely dislodge them both. One falls from my hand and bounces under the car.

From somewhere inside the house, I hear Meredith call. Only the words "Final Episode" register. I have plenty of time.

The metal blade feels heavy in my hand. For some reason, this surprises me. I wanted it to feel like a child's toy. It's much too dirty. When I wake up in the hospital, I don't want a lecture about cleanliness or Tetanus. So I knock the blade on the cement floor. Most of the clipping and soil fall below.

Next, I walk to the workbench to open a box of mechanics' rags and turpentine. After dowsing a rag, I clean. Before tossing it aside, I inhale the rag's fumes like I did as a teen in my grandfather's garage.

Then, I walk out into the summer air to hose off any remaining debris. Back inside, I dry the blade with a new towel.

Finding a spot in the garage to perform the act proves difficult. I don't want to jeopardize the lease agreement by getting even a drop of blood on the car, so I decide on the driveway. But when I consider the neighbors, I head back inside without closing the garage door. I'll do it in the empty second stall and hope nothing spurts onto the Camry.

I stand with the lawnmower blade raised high like a general ordering his troops to strike. My breath increases. It's in some random rhythm I've never experienced before, as though I could drum in a jazz trio. It's amazing. Still, I know it won't happen. My body will shut this whole production down, so I hold the adrenaline and savor it.

Suddenly, the door opens. Meredith appears in sweatpants and Journey's 1986 *Raised on Radio Tour* t-shirt. Without thinking, I sling the blade behind my back in a pathetic

attempt to conceal it. She looks at me like a petulant child. For a second, I think she knows, despite any evidence to support such an inane idea.

“Harold?”

Her eyebrow raises; it’s newly trimmed. She looks good. Why don’t I tell her that? I know she’ll ask what I’m hiding. When she does, I’ll be honest. After recycling those cans, I decided to bash this lawnmower blade in my skull. But, she speaks before I confess.

“Don’t forget to put the recycling bin back under the kitchen sink.”

The door shuts with a click. Sigh. I can’t decide if this is a new opportunity with the blade or not. For some reason, the metal feels cheap now – devoid of any power. Like a defeated pugilist, I return to the corner and decide to order my chaos.

I should re-attach the lawnmower blade first. On my knees I look for the bolt under the Camry. It’s just out of reach. Grunting, I stretch farther, pushing down, which sends the bolt forward under the passenger side wheel. When I get up I smack my head into the side mirror. Instinctually, I reach for the pain. With every heartbeat, the throbbing pain increases. White is replaced by red.

Without thinking, I grab the blade and return to the Camry. In a taxing motion, my swing encouraging me, I drive the blade into the door. With all that force, I expect the car to halve, to split in two, but the blade comes to a sudden stop, having lodged itself in the Camry’s inner door panel. The sound is unsatisfying, like squashing a plastic milk carton.

I try catching my breath, but my desire for the blade makes my lungs move faster. With my left hand over my right, I grab the sharpened end and pull. The blood oozes from my inner palm, and finally, a genuine smile. For more torque, I put my left leg on the door and arch. When the blade breaks free, I sail into the air, landing on my back.

Part of me wants to laugh, but the pain is overwhelming. Still, funny to know all of this is only temporary. In a day, I’ll have a serious lump and cut, but neither will last – not even the memory. In a week, I’ll remember the smallest detail from this evening. In a few months, I’ll piece together larger elements. In a year, I’ll recall the event without emotional attachment. And in ten years, I’ll condense the experience into one sentence with nothing to show for it.

So, I pick up my friend. With its corner I start carving the flesh above my right eye. When I'm sure the pressure is enough, I push deeper to ensure stitches. The mood is comfortably foreign. It will take time before I feel anything remotely close to this again. The blood, my curtain, sweeps closed. My right eye shuts.

On the garage floor, there is nothing to do but wait. For the first time since holding my mother for the last time, I weep. Looking through the open garage with one good eye, I watch the grass bend and sway as though it's just another night. Focusing on each blade of grass, I begin to count... one... two... three... four...

Nick Seifert holds a Master of Fine Arts degree with a fiction concentration from George Mason University and a Master's degree in English from St. Cloud State University. He's lived in the Twin Cities, the Big Apple, the Nation's Capital, and the Land of Morning Calm. Currently, Nick is an English lecturer at Howard University in D.C. His fiction has appeared in *Kaleidoscope: A Multicultural Literary Arts Magazine*, *SQ Mag*, *Bête Noire*, and *Fourteen Hills*.