

Mowin' Naked

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Neighbors been a little crazy lately. Everyone's still gabbin' about Ned and his mowin' the lawn naked. They all say he's goofed up in the head, bein' in his seventies and all. Wouldn't surprise me, he's been married for fifty-two years. Hell, I've been married for forty-five and the only thing keepin' me from goin' screwy is hangin' around with Ned.

I suppose I thought he was crazy too. Trimmin' the hedges in the back yard, and like always I start hearin' Ned, tryin' to start up that damn Briggs n' Stratton. I could tell he was havin' a hell of a time with it so I peek over the hedge to give'm a "Hello," and there he is, naked as a jaybird, yankin' on that pullcord, just a cussin' away.

Usually I come 'round the hedge an' hold the choke open with a screwdriver for him, but you just don't go helpin' a man who's yankin' at a lawn mower in his birthday suit. For a while I thought fer sure he was gonna get himself all tangled up in that cord, but after one big pull the damn thing farted out somethin' awful and started. It must of surprised the hell out of him, cause he went sprawlin' back on his grass and landed himself on his butt. He saw me peekin' over the hedge and laughed.

"Hey Jerry! I finally got this booger started without ya!"

I didn't say nothin'. I've never talked to a naked man before. I mean, how are you s'posed to talk to a man about lawnmower engines or the Packers when he's a standin', all fleshy an' all, right in front of you, just hangin' there like he's ready to hop in the shower or somethin'?

A couple minutes later I peeked on over again. Just wanted to make sure I wasn't seein' wrong; I felt bad about not talkin' back to him. He was still naked though, strollin' 'round that yard like he's thinkin' he's got all his clothes on. I wasn't lookin' too hard or nothin', but I could see clippin's clingin' to his spindly ol' legs an' stuck in his privates an' such.

'Bout this time I figgered out I wasn't the only one wonderin' what the heck was goin' on. That nosy ol' hag me and Ned always laugh about, Ms. Kellermann, was raisin' a brow above her fence and Dan Wilson, the insurance man, was starin' out from his hammock.

I just couldn't figger out what Ned thought he was doin'. Maybe Thelma was doin' his laundry an' he had nothin' to wear. There was nothin' out on the line though. Hell, even if she was doin' laundry, he could've pulled out those ol' navy blue fishin' pants he always wears. He hasn't let her wash those in about three years.

I went back to trimmin', but I was pretty bothered.

Our poker game was on Thursday, and like always, Ned was late. We all kept talkin' about him bein naked an' all. I guess the whole neighborhood knew 'bout it.

Ralph said he could figger Ned comin' over with nothin' but his poker hat on. He said he wouldn't be able to keep his poker face if he did. I didn't think I could either.

Fortunately he showed up with clothes coverin' him up. He was friendly an' everything, like nothin' outta the ord'nary had happened.

We didn't talk much, we just played. We all felt real funny-like. Usually me an' Ned gab lots on the way home, talkin' 'bout our ol' ladies an' stuff, but I couldn't talk with him much. It just didn't feel right.

The next Sunday I was out pullin' weeds when I heard him yankin' at his mower again, like always. I bet ya the whole neighborhood was lookin' out their windows, just prayin' Ned wasn't gonna make another show. I was awful worried too. I peeked up over the hedge just prayin' he had somethin' on.

But he didn't.

I couldn't figger it out. Of all the years me an' Ned known each other, all the fishin' trips, workin' on the cars, Sunday football, Poker nights, he always had his clothes hangin' all over his body. Now he was out barin' it in front of the whole damn neighborhood.

Someone had to say something to him an' I figgered it had to be me. After a while his mower belched a bit and shut herself down. I took another look over the hedge. He was haulin' the gas can to the mower. Folks 'round the lot were starin' at me from their windows an' Ms. Kellermann gave me one of her dirty looks from her flower garden that told me I better say somethin' to the ol' fool.

I hacked something from my throat an' Ned looked up all grinnin' an' friendly. "Hey Jerry, haven't seen much of ya lately."

I didn't answer him. I was thinkin' too hard what I was gonna say. "Uhh. . . Ned. . . you should really put some. . . uhh. . ." I couldn't figger out how to tell him. "Uhh. . . you should really put some shoes on. You'll chop yer feet off prancin' around barefooted like that."

He agreed, marched his skinny butt into his house to get a pair, and came back out wearin' just a pair of tennies. I went inside. I just didn't know how to tell him to put some damn clothes on.

Everyone was talkin' about it again that week. We called the poker game off 'cause Ralph and Earl decided it out that they were sick. I didn't see Ned at all that week. Things were really gettin' unnatural-like. Me and Ned were used to seeing each other almost every day. He was probably gettin' as lonely as I was. Why couldn't he just get a hankerin' to put some clothes on?

Sunday came again, and by then I knew. I wasn't wonderin' no more. I knew he was gonna be mowin' naked. I was rakin' twigs when he started yankin' at that damn cord again. I could hear him pullin' on it for 'bout five minutes, and I knew he wouldn't start it. The choke was stuck.

I went into the garage to my toolbox. When I came back out, Ms. Kellermann was givin' me the evil eye again from her flower garden. I gave her a wave and then slipped out of my Bermuda shorts and walked on over to Ned's with a screw-driver.