

Right of Spring

by Oliver Hunt

Art furtively stuffed the plastic K-Mart bag in the basement window well. In the bag were jelly beans, Peeps, foil wrapped chocolate eggs, five hollow chocolate bunnies, plastic grass and a large, plastic yellow egg with a clear top. He covered the bag with grass and went inside to color eggs with his mom, his brother Jared and his half-brother Trey.

Earlier, from his room, Art heard his mom fighting with Burt, his stepdad. Burt was pounding the table saying Goddamnit! Too much money is being spent on candy and kid's crap! You've already spoiled your own fucking soft sons! Janice, Art's mom, said Jesus, it's not that much money. I can cover it. I can at least put up a few bucks to see the kids happy. Fucking Hell, I just want to have a nice holiday, is that too much to ask? Burt said Know what? Yeah it is. Fuck the holiday!

Art pulled two tens from his sock drawer. Burt begrudgingly gave him an allowance for mowing the lawn and trimming the hedges. He was a hard ass about it though, going over Art's efforts and pointing to any missed spot, saying What, I'm supposed to pay you for a token effort? That's not how the world works, m'boy. Your *real* old man may have let you get away with being half-assed, but in the *real* world a man pulls his weight and *earns* his keep.

As he rode his bike to K-Mart he passed Widow-Witch Hathaway's house. She stood on her front porch, arms folded, looking crazy. As he rode past she yelled You little bastard psychopath! I know it was you! Someday you're gonna do something I can prove. Someday you'll be in jail, you little asshole! You'll be in juvie! I'll be in the courtroom laughing at you!

Last summer, Art and his brothers' Frisbee landed on Hathaway's roof. There was a large tree in her backyard that led right to it. If she'd let him climb it he could've gotten his Frisbee, no problem. When he knocked on her door she practically snarled at him, saying Looks like it's my Frisbee now.

He looked back at Trey and Jared as she slammed the door on him. He didn't say anything. He went to her backyard and climbed her tree as she yelled at him from her window.

Hell are you doing?

Getting your Frisbee for you.

I don't want it!

Cool, I'll take it then.

This is my yard, I'll call the cops!

Arthur got the Frisbee and hung from the tall limb he'd climbed to. Hathaway said I told you! This is my yard!

Art said That means if I break my leg my parents can sue you. He then let go of the limb and dropped quietly into Hathaway's purple and yellow tulip bed, crushing a few. He said Sorry about the tulips Mrs. Hathaway, but luckily my leg seems to be okay.

Mrs. Hathaway's face turned white and then red. I'm calling your mother you little fucker! If she's any sort of parent she'll smack some sense into you!

Okay Mrs. Hathaway.

I think we should go play Frisbee somewhere else, he said to Jared and Trey.

Jared asked Are we all gonna get in trouble?

Art said Nobody's gonna get in trouble.

Trey asked Why did you get the Frisbee even after she said no?

Art said Because it's easier to ask forgiveness than permission.

Jared asked Why wouldn't we be in trouble?

Art said Because mom knows Mrs. Hathaway's crazy.

There were two older neighborhood delinquents named Gus and Bone. Last summer they'd started trashing Hathaway's flowers and shrubs. They'd spray-painted pentagrams on her garage doors and Sharpie scrawled dicks, skulls and upside down crosses all over her house. Hathaway never saw them, so she blamed Art. She'd called Janice to rant and rave after every new round of vandalism. Janice would hang up the phone and say I know it wasn't you. Just try to avoid her, okay?

It's Gus and Bone, Art said. If I rat on them they'll kill me, and Hathaway wouldn't believe me anyway.

I know, Janice said. Give it time, what goes around comes around.

When he was sure everyone was asleep, Art retrieved his bag from the window well. He artfully arranged a separate Easter layout in the plastic egg and wrote Happy Easter in Olde English script—signed with an outline of bunny ears—on a scrap of notecard. He then took a couple of Burt's Marlboros and his lighter and went outside. As he smoked in the backyard he saw a possum approaching. He picked up a large rock and smashed the possum's head with it.

He made a makeshift cross out of two large tree branches and, using thick twine, crucified the possum on it. He took the cross and shoved it, upside down, into Hathaway's tulips. Using his tiny pocket knife, he gutted it, so its blood and guts dripped all over Hathaway's prized flowers.

The next day Janice saw the egg display and gushed. Oh, how wonderful! She looked to Burt with a sly grin and Burt just looked confused. Janice later told Art Burt tried to deny he made that basket, claiming he had no idea who did. I know he felt guilty about what he'd said, Janice said. I know he just wanted to make it up to us. Burt has a heart, he really does. Art grinned. He was fine with Burt taking the credit.

And when the phone rang Art knew it was Hathaway, and that his mom would just laugh at her. He also knew next time he mowed the lawn or trimmed the hedges he'd really attack the job. Give his stepdad nothing to grouse over. Make him proud. Art realized a job well done is its own reward.

