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Fat Money Summer

We are finishing up the front yard at the Chandler's house, and a fat guy pulls up in a silver Corniche. He honks and waves us over. He wants to know if we can take on another yard for the summer. "Sure we can," my brother says, because he always does the talking. The guy tells Adam about what all he needs done, but I don't really listen. I stare at the man—the fattest gut I've ever seen. I look at the big, round face. It's so red above his white collar that I'm thinking it's going to explode. I listen to the gasping noise he makes as he sucks in air. We always get baked before we mow, so I'm still super stoned and I'm in sort of a trance just looking at all this weight. Can he possibly walk? What about going to the john? No way could he reach his dick. I snap out of it when the guy smiles at me and sticks out his hand. I smile back and lean into the car to reach his little hand. "Peter," I say to him. His hand is warm and soft.

"See you boys tomorrow then," he says and drives off in his beautiful car.

"Give Jah the thanks and praise, Ital. The Lawn Rangers just added another fifty bucks a week to the ganja fund," Adam says. We slap hands and walk behind the garage to smoke a celebration joint before starting on the back. Later, down at the ocean, we pass a joint around with some friends. Adam describes the fat man. "I'm not kidding, this is the fattest person I've ever seen in real life. I thought the motherfucker was going to have a heart attack just sitting there talking to me. He kept making a little hissing noise, you know, like the sleestack from that show. What's the name of it?"

"Planet of the Apes?"

"No, man. That was a movie. There were no sleestacks." Nobody thinks of it, and we talk about *Where the Wild Things Are*. It's a book.

We've been smoking pot non-stop this summer. The whole reason we started the Lawn Rangers was to have money for drugs. Of course there are other benefits to mowing yards: choose your own hours, out in the sun, no millions of little chores for zero money. But, yeah, the best thing for me is earning money for dope and getting high with Adam. Some people make you feel nervous, but Adam just makes you laugh. He comes up with some of his best ideas when he's stoned—"hideas" is what he calls them. He made up this one game last summer he called French handball—kind of a mix between the best parts of football and basketball—that every kid down at the beach was playing by the end of the summer. Adam's team never lost, no matter how high he was. Adam can play any game. He only played tennis for a month before he had it down and could thump kids on the high school team. The coaches are always trying to get him to play their sport at high school, but he never will. I don't know why. It's funny. Adam's in the eleventh grade, and everybody, even the seniors, know he's the best athlete in the school— and he hasn't played a single organized sport there yet.

We start on Mr. Seay's yard at nine while it's still cool. He's reading the paper on the back porch, and we say good morning. "Have you had any breakfast yet?"

"We're fine, thanks. We got to get started before it gets too hot," Adam says. While we mow around the porch, I sneak looks at Mr. Seay. He's put down his paper and he's looking at Adam. I don't think much of it. I'm used to people staring at Adam. Down at the beach, around town, at school. Everybody likes to look at Adam. He's easy on the eyes.

By the time we finally bag the grass it's one. We go up to the back door to tell Mr. Seay we're finished. He invites us into the cool house. He ask us do we want any beer. He leads us into a clean white room that looks out over the ocean. Neither one of us sits down. We are hot and flecks of green are stuck all over us, but I guess Mr. Seay doesn't mind because he offers us a seat. Mr. Seay asks us friendly questions: How many yards are we doing. Were we born here in Scituate. What do we do for fun. An old black lady brings in a tray loaded with food and beer.

"Thank you, Effie," Mr. Seay says to her and then to us: "Do you like swordfish?" We sit over there for an hour drinking and eating. He's easy to talk to, and you get used to the weight. After a while Adam says we got to get going. We've still got another yard to do.

"Come back and take a swim later on," he says. "Hey, before I forget, let me give you the money." He takes a wallet out of his breast pocket and opens it. I can see it clearly. It's thick with bills. Mr. Seay smiles at Adam. "Is a hundred fair?"

Adam laughs. "That's fair."

We start spending all our time at Mr. Seay's. He likes having us over and it's fun. We drink all the beer we want. We get high on the third floor balcony where you can see Provincetown. Mr. Seay buys us these beach go-carts. They're great. We race around the dune shooting at seagulls with pellet guns. We watch movies and pornos with Mr. Seay on his big screen T.V. We jump off the top of the house into the deep end and Mr. Seay videotapes us. He doesn't like smoking pot. We snort coke with him. We all get wired and go down to the pool and play this game in the shallow end that Adam calls Effieland. We try to swim from one side to the other without Mr. Seay grabbing hold of us. Do it five times and you're in Effieland. First person there tells Effie what's for dinner. It doesn't really matter who wins, though. We all choose lobster.

Sometimes when we're all in the pool Adam gets out and says, "I'm going to get a beer- anyone want anything?" He goes to the refrigerator in the pool house. Mr. Seay leaves his wallet in the pool house, so Adam grabs a Budweiser and two one hundred dollar bills. Mr. Seay is loaded. He never notices. Adam and I quit most of our yards. What's the point?

In the middle of August a northeaster hits the cape. The waves get big and the rain comes down hard. Adam and I are on the bedroom balcony throwing white tennis balls into the surf. Mr. Seay yells at us to come inside. He wants to take us into Harvard Square to buy some clothes.

"Okay," we say.

"Just let me get cleaned up and we'll be off." He takes his wallet out of his shirt pocket. He puts it on the bedroom bureau next to his watch and waddles off into the bathroom. Adam smiles at me and walks over to the wallet.

"One for you and one for me," he says and hands me mine. Adam says he wants to get an overcoat. He might get cashmere. I want camel's hair. Mr. Seay comes out in a white bathrobe and walks straight to his wallet. He starts to count his money. I can't swallow and my throat feels dry.

"Did you take money out of my wallet?" Mr. Seay says to me, calm not angry. My face is burning. I look at Adam.

"What are you talking about, Mr. Seay?" Adam says and smiles. "Are you joking?"

Mr. Seay looks at Adam. He smiles too. "Did you take two hundred dollars out of my wallet?"

"What?"

"Just now. While I was in the bathroom."

"No. Fuck no, we didn't take any money."

Mr. Seay is still smiling. "Maybe I should count again. I must've made a mistake, right?" He opens his wallet and this time counts out loud. He stops at fourteen. He looks up at Adam. "You stole two hundred dollars from me.": Adam has his hand in his pocket. I know he's touching the money. Mr Seay picks up the phone and dials.

"What are you doing?"

"Calling the police."

"Mr. Seay, come on. You don't have to do that."

He stops. He puts the receiver down. "That's right, Adam. I don't." His face is so red. He stares at Adam. He nods. "You're not dumb, Adam. You know what I'm saying to you. Why don't you tell Peter to go home."

I'm watching Adam's lips move and I don't recognize the voice: "Peter, I'll meet you at home." I just stand there. I'm looking at them and it's crazy. "Did you hear what I just fucking said to you? Let's go. Get the fuck out of here." My brother grabs my arm and pushes me toward the door.

I wait for Adam underneath a tree out of the rain.