

## Less Than Perfect

Samuel McBride polished the last spot away from his window and stood back to admire the perfect shine. He wrinkled his nose at the tart smell of the vinegar from the window cleaner and opened his window to let in the sweet smell of his honeysuckle. That's when he saw it. It couldn't be true. With shaking hands, he removed the back door key from its compartment in the neatly organised drawer and flung open the door.

He stood on the doorstep stiff and straight, dressed in his immaculately pressed brown slacks, his shirt and regimental tie. Absently he tried to run his fingers through his grey hair, only to find it was too short and the bristles of his hair scratched at his hand.

He breathed deeply in exact ten-second bursts and reluctantly decided he could not put off inspecting his garden.

Avoiding the problem for as long as he could, he inspected his bushes first. They were all in order standing in straight rows and each one neatly trimmed in a symmetrical circle with not a leaf out of place. The neighbours told him he should put bedding plants round them for some colour, but it was his garden and he'd do what he liked with it. His plants all had a purpose. The honeysuckle for scent and flower and the bushes when fully grown would give him some privacy from his nosy neighbours.

His eyes strayed over the slabs, scrubbed clean with bleach the day before. The border of the lawn was straight with not a blade out of place. The grass was as short as his hair, with even blades and identical straight lines. But when he looked

at the centre of the grass he gasped. It was true. There it was. A mound of earth in the middle of his immaculate lawn.

Reluctantly he walked onto the lawn. Not much point in worrying about disturbing the pattern when there was a mound of earth sitting right in the middle.

Samuel heard a snigger from over his fence. That teenage boy from next door was standing laughing at him. Of course. He must have done it. The boy was a nasty piece of work. The boy's father came out of the house and looked over.

'Ah Samuel,' he said, barely stifling his laughter, 'I see you have a mole hill in your nice neat lawn.'

'Mole,' Samuel said, 'mole! That's ridiculous. I can't have a mole. A mole would go for your scrawny piece of uncut grass and weeds. Easy pickings.'

'Ah but you're wrong there,' said his neighbour. 'Your nicely tended grass with plenty of aeration, worms and bugs makes ideal conditions for a mole.'

Samuel gazed at his grass in despair and disbelief as his two neighbours went back into their house with a cheery, 'Good luck.'

Samuel stood savouring the sweet scent of the grass freshly cut the day before. He knelt down on the soft silky grass to examine the mound when he caught movement out of the corner of his eye. Looking over he could swear his grass was moving. He blinked and shook his head but there it was again the grass was definitely moving and accompanied by a rasp of chewing, little chunks of earth started appearing above the ground.

Samuel pushed up stiffly on his arthritic knees, strode over to his shed and calmly grabbed a heavy shovel before walking back to where the other mound of earth was appearing. He raised the shovel and whacked down on it with the spade. He heard a scrabbling noise and then the ground appeared to shake. Perhaps it was the mole retreating down its labyrinth of tunnels, but Samuel could not get rid of the impression that it was shaking with laughter.

This was war. And the most important thing in any war was reconnaissance. Samuel walked back into the house and booted up his laptop. Some research later he settled down in his back garden. He sat on a backless folding stool with his back straight and beside him on a small table were neat squares of sandwiches and a thermos of tea so that he could remain at his post. On the other side of him was a post topped by an unlit 50w LED spotlight. As always he considered the environment. In his hand, he held the spade.

He sat almost motionless for hours despite the niggle of his arthritis, then finally he was rewarded with movement at the tiny hole in the middle of the original mound. He watched amazed as at least six worms wriggled quickly out of the ground and away over his grass. Then a small but long snout sniffed its way above ground, followed by two tiny feet and finally two round black eyes appeared. He could not believe how tiny the mole was to create such havoc in his perfect lawn. But he was here to do a job. He switched on the light and watched as the mole sat blinded and petrified halfway out the hole.

'Not so funny now,' said Samuel and slammed the spade down. Lifting it up, he expected to see flattened mole, but all he saw was a flattened molehill over his

now even less than perfect lawn. Then there was that same little shake of the ground as if the mole laughed his way down to his family.

Next day Samuel bated his grass with mole poison. By the following morning his grass was covered in dead worms and beetles and slugs, but no mole.

He tried a sonic device but this time, he was convinced the mole really was laughing at him as it danced to the sound only it could hear.

Another spell on the internet resulted in the next day delivery of a mole trap. Against his better judgement he bought a humane one and bated it with all sort of mole goodies. He almost couldn't believe his eyes the following morning. There sat in the middle of the cage, coolly chewing on a beetle, was his little furry nemeses.

He took a trip to a wildlife centre with the mole. Not too far to drive in his Lexus, but far enough to prevent the mole returning. Then that evening he allowed himself a small malt whisky to celebrate, savouring the warmth and taste of oak.

Next morning he was out bright and early ready to start repairing the damage to his lawn. He had allowed himself to dress down in denims and sweatshirt for the work but as always they were impeccably ironed.

His happy whistle as he exited the back door stopped as he saw his lawn. Yet another mole hill had appeared and raised ridges in his grass linked the hills.

'That'll be the female,' his neighbour said cheerfully. 'She probably has a family to feed all by herself now.'

Samuel was disappointed, but he had the measure of the little blighters now so that night the trap was back out and next day he transported Mrs Mole to join her husband.

He got home as dusk was falling and went straight out to his lawn. He was relieved to see no new mounds had appeared and he kneeled down to start flattening a mole hill. But as he did there was a movement and a tiny body appeared above the ground. He'd thought the adult mole was small but the baby was minute. Samuel couldn't bring himself to kill the little creature and reluctantly he offered it a small beetle that made the mistake of walking past. The baby mole climbed into Samuel's hand and sat there chewing at the beetle. The smoothness of the tiny mole's fur and the warmth of its body felt good. Then it curled up into a ball and went sound asleep.

'Well little fellow,' Samuel whispered, 'it looks like you and I are going to be bunk mates for a while.'