**Grass Stains**

Madison Christian

The grass is pleasant against my body. It’s surprisingly cool, despite the fact that it’s midday. Due to the north-south orientation of my lot and its distorted shape, the sun doesn’t splash warmth equitably across the yard. This little swath of lawn, situated on the lee side of the house, is protected from full exposure to the sun’s withering rays. So, the turf here remains damp and soft despite the cruel September heat. The dark ground, heavy with clay, exudes a pleasant, earthy aroma reminiscent of night-crawlers, pill bugs, and decaying organic matter. Maybe that’s why my canine companion Joji always plunks down here. In an otherwise unappealing yard, there’s a subtle attractiveness to this particular spot.

Lying here with Joji, my back to the ground and eyes to the sky, I’m reminded of the days when I had a more intimate connection to terra firma. There’s a satisfaction you get from rolling around on the ground and getting dirt on your elbows and grass in your hair. Or just lingering in the sun and delighting in your kinship with the natural world. The memory of that is tucked away somewhere in the inner recesses of my psyche, but as an adult, it’s been tamped down to prevent it from bubbling to the surface. Because you can’t serve the dual masters of child’s play and maturity. Proper decorum doesn’t allow it. Still, there remains a nostalgic irresistibility to it that adulthood cannot fully suppress.

When I was young, being prone on the lawn in some capacity was a normal, everyday occurrence. My little brother and I would often play football in our big back yard wearing NFL uniforms that dad bought for us. In my New York Jets uniform, I was always Joe Namath. My brother, wearing the blue and white of the Los Angeles Rams, was Roman Gabriel. We’d spend hours each week tackling each other to the ground, our knees stained red and green from a mixture of blood and grass.

When the nights were warm, my dad, brother, and I would get out the cheap, flannel sleeping bags, unroll them on the grass, and camp in the backyard. In the dark, dad would point out Ursa Major, Orion, the Pleiades, and other celestial bodies. He also tried to show us Ursa Minor and Polaris, but I could never see them despite telling him otherwise. Awakening at first light, the air was chilly and the dew on the grass glittered like diamonds. Sometimes, I’d discover my brother missing. My mind would race to dark places before I’d realize that he had furtively crept back into the house sometime during the night.

The neighborhood I lived in as a child was like a William Golding novel. It was packed with riotous, unsupervised kids always screaming and running scattershot in the streets. On summer weekends, when the sun hung late in the sky, we would all congregate to play “Kick the Can” until it was so dark we couldn’t see any longer. We’d jump fences, run through the neighbors’ yards, crouch down in window wells clogged with cobwebs, burrow beneath hedges, hide in piles of leaves, and surreptitiously belly-crawl along the ground to reach the empty Campbell’s soup can that served as home base to liberate the hostages. Through all of it, we were constantly one with the land.

I can’t pinpoint the exact day or even year, but at some point in my development, that natural connection was broken. The ground under my feet was no longer a part of me, but instead something foreign and external. I walked on it, recreated on it, drove over it, landscaped it, and lived on it, but I no longer possessed what Glenn Albrecht calls eutierria, or “a good and positive feeling of oneness with the earth and its life forces.” Instead, the dirty ground was to be avoided. To be upon it required a chair, blanket, pad, or other prophylactic to prevent actual contact and to maintain cleanliness.

But here on the brink of my gray years, sweet little Joji has brought me back. He has eutierria. So does my daughter who routinely hugs trees. It must be a tendency shared by youth whose subconscious instinctually still recalls our terrestrial origins. That could account for the contentment I now feel from just lying here on the grass. On the finite timeline of life, I now occupy space equivalent to that of a child. So maybe ancient connections are being re-established and my eutierria is awakening from torpor. Perhaps I’m starting to feel good and positive feelings of oneness with the earth again because in the not-too-distant future, that oneness will be more than just an academic concept. Admittedly, that’s an unsettling thought, so I brush it aside and just lay on my little patch of lawn with Joji, enjoying the moment and savoring a more metaphysical oneness with the dust and dirt. At this point, I’m not looking for a more committed relationship than that. And I’m certainly in no rush to tie the knot. Literal oneness can wait.