

Anna Molnar

We Fade to Green



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Layout & cover design: Bari Kathins
Conception & text: Anna Molnar
Illustrations: Bari Kathins

ISBN: 979-8-560-99264-4
Imprint: Independently published

With a little bit of sunshine, the sky can fade to green ...

The homeowner's association

Tuesday morning and the meeting with the homeowner's association rolled around in no time. Stephen, Katie, and I went to school with Mom, and Apu went to face the homeowner's association with Dad.

We couldn't wait to come back from school to hear how it all went. Mom didn't know either; Dad and Apu hadn't come back before she left to pick us up.

When we came into the house, Dad, Apu, and Nagyí were sitting in the kitchen, speaking loudly and waving half-filled champagne glasses in the air. A bottle of Veuve Clicquot champagne lay empty on the table.

"Apu was a maniac!" Dad said as a greeting to us.

"So how'd it go?" Mom asked.

"They attacked him!" Nagyí said.

"What?" Mom asked.

"Oh, just wait 'till you hear this, Anna!" Dad said, "They brought up everything. I mean everything!"

"What everything? What do you mean?" Mom said, confused.

"We weren't there to talk about a garden shop! Oh no, sir! We were there to defend ourselves against your idiot neighbors!" Apu fumed, and the hairs stood up on his head.

"What? But then why are you all so happy?" Mom asked.

"They attacked him but he defended himself!" Nagyi said and kissed Apu, who was smiling and seemed to have already calmed down.

"Okay, so listen," Dad took over, "we thought we were going in to explain the garden and the little shop ideas. We had our arguments, our charts, our little explanations ..."

"And? But?" Mom pried.

"They attacked him!" Nagyi said again and took another sip of champagne.

"Can we have some, too?" Stephen asked, looking at the champagne.

"In the fridge. Go get it. I chilled two bottles of alcohol free for you guys!" Mom told Stephen, but kept looking at Dad and Apu, urging them to go on.

"Well, before we even got to say anything, Marlon asked us to sit down and told us they'd been holding off on sending us a summons, but that there have been complaints, and they didn't know how to

address them with us, bla-ti-da ...” Dad explained.

“What complaints? What are they talking about?” Mom asked.

“I told you that you cannot go out in underwear! You are a crazy old man! I told you!” Nagyi said.

“What?” Mom insisted.

“You know how I like to get the morning paper in my underwear?”
Apu laughed.

“Do I ever?! It has always been a source of embarrassment for me!”
Mom said, smiling.

“Did Apu do that already when you were little?” I asked.

“He has always done that!” Nagyi said, shaking her head.

“What is wrong with that? So stupid! It is a body, a human body!
And I wear underwear. It is like a swim suit!” Apu said.

“A speedo, maybe!” Stephen said, struggling to open the bottle of kids’ champagne.

“Give me that, buddy!” Dad said, taking the bottle from Stephen.

“But no one ever said anything!” Mom was shocked.

“They smile to your face and then they complain!” Nagyi sighed.

“Well, let’s be fair. It was just one household that complained,” Dad explained.

"Who?" Mom asked.

"I bet I know who," I said. "It has to be the house at the end of the cul-de-sac. You know the ones with the five kids, all just a year apart."

"The Smiths!?" Mom said, half yelling.

"I've seen the little one stare at Apu!" I said.

"The little blond girl with the curls?" Apu asked.

I nodded yes.

"Oh, I always stick out my tongue at her," Apu continued. "You think it's them?!"

"It has to be!" I said, pretty sure I was right!

"It doesn't really matter. Apu handled it amazingly!" Dad said.

"Okay?!" Mom raised her eyebrows impatiently.

"I told them. 'Okay listen! I do this all my life. And it is an expression of myself and of my freedom, but you tell me what the rule is. If there is a rule that nobody is allowed to be outside in underwear, I will not break the rule. Okay?'" Apu said clearly, "Then, I told them, 'I think there is for sure no rule in this country against wearing a bathing suit on your own property. Is there? Okay. So, since it bothers somebody that I get the morning paper in my underwear, I will from now on get it in my swimsuit!'" Apu said and finished his glass of champagne.

Dad had given the three of us kids glasses by now, and he poured us each some delicious alcohol free champagne. I loved how it tasted. It was like juice, only sparkly and less sweet. It made me feel all grown

up. And since the adults were drinking champagne, it was great to be allowed to join in.

What made me happiest was that Mom had thought of it. Maybe Mom was back! I smiled at Mom.

She came over and hugged me from the back. And she didn't let go. She just kept standing like that, holding me against her. Mom was definitely back!

Dad and Apu were giving each other high-fives, and Dad was saying "Buah!" and "Yeah, baby!" I had never before noticed that Dad had a rebel in him!

"Are you going to get the morning paper in your swimsuit now, Apu?" Katie asked.

"I most certainly am, *Katica bogár!*"

"Every morning?" Katie asked.

"I am going to buy seven new swimsuits in different colors, and I will wear one on Monday, one on Tuesday, one on Wednesday ..." Apu said laughing.

"What color will you wear on Sunday?" Katie asked.

"Maybe Sunday I will actually wear underwear and pants and a shirt!" Apu said, and everybody cracked up.

"How did the committee take it?" Mom asked, still holding me.

"We didn't know at this point," Dad answered.

"Wait! Wait! There is more!" Apu continued.

"They even say we are mean to *Koborkám!*" Nagyi burst out.

"That's crazy!" I said and leaned my head on Mom's arm.

"Well, it seems, we have some neighbors who don't believe in having a cat in a harness or on a leash!" Dad explained.

"Well, they have a point," Mom said.

"What? The golden harness accents her beautiful fur!" Nagyi said, petting Kobor on her shoulder.

"Seriously, Anna, what business is it of theirs?" Dad yelled.

"No, I only mean that walking a cat on a leash is somewhat unorthodox," Mom laughed.

"Okay, let's not get into what's orthodox and what's not, and whether the homeowner's association should have any say in it!" Dad shouted.

"So what did you guys say?" Mom asked.

"I told them that my wife loves that stupid cat, and that we saved the poor abandoned cat," Apu explained.

"Your dad got really mad. I actually thought it might go wrong any second. His hairs were standing straight up on his head and he was saying stupid a lot. I was sure more was coming!" Dad said, still overly excited.

"But I did not say bad words, did I, son-in-law?" Apu asked, and he and Dad gave each other high-fives again, and fist bumped, and even

made it blow up.

"I said: 'Please pardon me a minute. You have made me very angry and I need to run it off!'" Apu continued.

"He actually got up, went out in the yard, and ran around in circles for a few minutes!" Dad said, chuckling and shaking his head.

"You did not!" Stephen said.

"I did!" Apu said proudly, "Listen! I promised your father I would not curse any more, not in English at least! A promise is a promise! And I know I get mad fast, so I figured out if I do exercise, I am not mad any more. And good, fast, easy exercise that you can also do in a suit is running around."

"Oh my goodness, Apu!" I said.

"You could have done jumping jacks!" Stephen said.

"But this way, I had fresh air, too! Much better!" Apu said.

"You two put on quite a show!" Mom said.

"So your dad comes back after running around. You should have seen their faces. They didn't know what to say or do. It was awesome! So he comes back and says ... How does it go again, Apu?"

"Condemnant quo non intellegunt."

"What's that?" Katie asked.

"It's Latin!" Nagy explained.

"They did not understand!" Apu laughed.

"Of course they didn't!" Dad said. "I didn't understand!"

"You are stupid, too!" Apu told Dad, and they gave each other fives on the sly.

"You know who understood?" Dad asked, "Tom Duchanell!" Dad said and smiled.

"He is educated!" Apu said.

"Tom Duchanell understood and stood up for Apu." Dad continued, "He told the committee that indeed people should not condemn that which they do not understand, and asked if they were going to consider every single complaint or concern each individual person ever raised."

"There's this family that walks their son on a leash!" I added.

"Oh yeah!" Stephen joined in, "I hate that!"

"Are you going to put me on a leash?" Katie asked.

Dad picked her up and swung her on his shoulders. Then Dad started trotting around like a horse. Katie giggled and screamed, "Go horsey!"

"So, is it not allowed to have Kobor in a harness?" I asked.

"Well, Mr. Yelson had a few words to say about that, actually." Dad put Katie back down on the ground.

"Who's Mr. Yelson?" Stephen asked.

"He's one of the committee members," Mom answered.

"He is a lawyer!" Apu said.

"Apparently, according to the law, a pet is personal property, and as such, can be dressed any way the owner sees fit," Dad explained.

"You like your golden outfit!" Nagyi stroked and kissed Kobor on her shoulder.

Kobor purred and rubbed his head against Nagyi's.

"But Mr. Yelson had a bone to pick with us, still," Dad said, grimacing.

"There's more?" Mom asked.

"Yep! There were three more complaints that all had to do with the snow days in December, when school was out, and we had all those kids over. Remember? Well, Bob and Nancy wrote an official complaint, apparently, about us stealing their snow."

"Before or after their dog attacked our child?" Mom fumed.

"Before!" Apu said.

"And wait!" Dad continued, "Joshua complained about the kids making noise on the snow days. It made him nervous to see so many kids playing outside, and he claimed it disturbed the peace and quiet of the neighborhood."

"Stupid old people!" Nagyi sighed.

"And ..., wait for it ... Jamie MacPherson claimed the kids trampled her flowers while they were on her lawn gathering snow."

"Flowers in December?" Mom asked exasperated.

"Well, they damaged the buds, or roots, or whatever underneath the snow. She wanted 200 bucks for it!" Dad said.

"What in the world!" Mom yelled and pulled away from hugging my back.

It felt like being forced to take off a cozy winter jacket.

Now, I was mad, too!

"Have they all gone crazy?!" Mom yelled, "And they never even said anything to us! This was all in December. It's the end of March!"

"That's what your dad said. Well, after he ran a few rounds in the yard again!" Dad explained.

"I was so mad!" Apu said.

"But you owned it!" Dad told Apu, and the two of them jumped up and gave each other double high-fives.

Then Dad went into a squat right in front of Apu and screamed battle cries. Apu did the same thing, and the two of them stood there, squatting, punching in the air, and screaming into each other's faces like enraged football players. Once they got that out of their system, they hugged.

"Okay, can you two cave men talk to me?!" Mom ordered.

"Everything's good!" Apu said smiling and gave Mom a kiss on the forehead.

Dad grabbed Mom and swung her around the kitchen with dance steps.

"It was fun, Anna!" Dad shouted and kissed Mom.

"You're both crazy!" Mom said laughing.

"What did you guys say?" I asked.

"I said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, this is bull beep-beep!'" Apu said.

"Apu said a bad word!" Katie giggled.

"There are times when bull beep-beep has to be called!" Dad said.

"Daddy said a bad word!" Katie giggled on.

"I told them I believe in saying what you think and in being honest. If you want to punch a guy in the face, you punch him in the face. You don't go tell his mommy about it," Apu said.

"Well, I had to stop Apu there!" Dad said.

"But it is true! Getting punched is not a bad thing!" Apu said.

"You and I disagree about that, Apu!" Dad said.

"It is so stupid. That is why people are all so anxious! Everybody is suppressed. If you are angry, show you are angry!" Apu yelled, and his hairs stood up on his head.

We all stopped to see what would happen. Apu said something in Hungarian and then added in English, "I have to run it off! Wait a second!"

Apu went out into the yard and ran in circles. We just watched in silence. By about round 6, his hairs slowly went back to resting position on his head, and Apu came back to us smiling.

“I am a genius! This running it off really works!” Apu said proudly.

“I’m sorry, Apu, I didn’t want to make you mad,” Dad said.

“It’s okay, son-in-law!” Apu said and gave Dad two strong pats on the back. “That is my point, actually. Why are people so afraid of making you mad? It’s okay to be mad. It is good – fills you with hormones!”

“Yes, but ...” Dad started to say, but Apu interrupted him.

“Oh, yes, yes! Whatever ... Anyway ... Let me tell my story!”

I had to stop and think. A few months before, this whole conversation would have been a fight, and my family would have been upset, and sad, and frustrated. Now, it was all funny.

What had changed?

I wasn’t sure.

What mattered was that things had changed, and for the better!

As I looked at everybody’s face, I could see that we were all having a great time, just standing in the kitchen, talking to each other about some meeting with the homeowner’s association.

And then I noticed something else. Mom had colored her hair. She was no longer grey. She was back to her light brown hair. Only, there were now blond and reddish highlights all over. Her hair shined in the light. Mom looked pretty again.

Apu continued his story, "I said to them, 'Ladies and gentlemen, the homeowner's association should concern itself with important matters, not with bull beep-beep fights between neighbors. I hope everybody is aware of the fact that Bob and Nancy Furrows raised and owned a dangerous dog that bit my granddaughter. We did not press charges. We did not come complain to you. But I think we must all agree that this matter was more significant than taking snow off of a yard to make fun for children. The Furrows do not matter to me, and I will not discuss anything about them.'"

Nagyi said a series of words in Hungarian and made some funny gestures with her hands.

"Anyukám!" Mom said.

"It was in Hungarian!" Nagyi said.

"Oh come on Anna, the Furrows are total beep-beeps," Dad said.

"I agree!" I said.

"Total beep-beeps!" Stephen said and went to pick up Katie.

"Beep-beeps," Katie repeated, "especially Jack-o! I'm glad he's gone!"

"Listen! Then I told them that Joshua Diets was an old fart, who should spend more time outside in the fresh air, instead of sitting around in his house, waiting to be annoyed. I told them that I will not make excuses for children enjoying the snow and making some noise during the day!"

"Absolutely! Well said!" Dad said.

"As for Jamie MacPherson, I do not believe her complaint, but I will

take over 200 dollars to her house this evening,” Apu said.

“Marlon tried to tell your dad that the committee would be happy to take care of the transition of money between quarrelling parties, and that your dad should avoid further conflict by going over to Mrs. MacPherson’s house.”

“I told them, ‘Please, sir, do not tell me where I may and may not go. Mrs. MacPherson lives next door to us. We have to live closer to her than you. I think it is time we talk openly.’”

“I’m very proud of you!” Mom said and gave Apu a kiss, “You said it perfectly!”

“I also said, ‘You know, sometimes people from different countries think a little different. I am not from your country. For me, some of the things you do are absurd. But I am sure many things I do are absurd to you. But I am in your country and I will respect the rules of this country!’”

“I think that actually embarrassed the mighty committee,” Dad said.

“Unbelievable!” Mom exclaimed, “But did you get to talk about Nagy’s flower-slash-jewelry shop at all?”

“And my garden!” Apu added.

“Oh, so, yeah!” Dad said, “After Apu’s speech, I took over and asked them to please allow us to address the points we actually were there to discuss with them. Tom Duchanell told them right away that he was involved in working out the details of our plans for the flower-slash-jewelry shop and that he was 100 % in favor of granting us our request.”

"It was in the bag!" Apu said.

"They agreed?" Mom asked.

"They agreed before we asked!" Apu said.

"They signed off on all of it," Dad said, "– the size of the shop, it being in the front yard, the little front yard garden ... All of it!"

Who would have thought it? Apu faced the homeowner's association and won!

After the meeting with the homeowner's association, Nagyi and Apu (and Kobor on her golden leash) went over to Mrs. MacPherson's house with a potted rose bush and 200 dollars.

Mrs. MacPherson invited them in for coffee and wouldn't accept the money. She told them she did not like them allowing all of us kids to go on her lawn without asking for permission. Nagyi and Apu saw her point and agreed to ask next time.

Kobor met Mrs. MacPherson's cat Julio, and the two of them hit it off right away.

In fact, Julio was bought a silver harness and leash, and my grandparents started sharing Kobor's walks with Mrs. MacPherson and Julio.