

# SHADE

**A one-act play by Shay K. Azoulay**

## CHARACTERS

WRITER, a man in his late thirties

NEIGHBOR, a man in his mid thirties

*A suburban yard. A tree stands in the center of the stage, surrounded by a well-tended bed of flowers. To the left – a pile of recently trimmed branches, to the right – a wooden chair and table.*

*The Writer is sitting on the chair with a pen in his hand, facing a notebook on the table, which is evidently empty. He occasionally glances over at the flowers and returns his gaze to the white page.*

*The Neighbor enters from left with a ladder, places it near the tree, dangerously close to the flowers, and exits to the left. He returns with a rope tied to the edge of a sun shade and climbs the ladder carefully. The Writer looks at him with some concern, places his pen on the notebook, and stands up. He advances a few steps towards the Neighbor, hesitates, and finally approaches him.*

WRITER: [*jokingly*] Wha... What's up? Taking over my yard?

NEIGHBOR: [*deadpan*] Yes. [*Pause*] Don't worry, I'm just tying this to the tree, so I'll have shade over my yard.

WRITER: Oh, okay, just... If you don't mind, after you finish... The branches.

NEIGHBOR: What?

WRITER: The branches you sawed off, please don't leave them in my yard.

NEIGHBOR: Yes.

WRITER: Thank you. [*Turns to leave*]

NEIGHBOR: You know it's your tree.

WRITER: What?

NEIGHBOR: It's your tree. The branches were sticking over my yard so I cut them off.

WRITER: That's fine, I don't mind, just pick them up after you're done.

NEIGHBOR: Yes.

WRITER: And please, watch the flowers.

NEIGHBOR: I see 'em.

WRITER: Thank you. [*Turns to leave*]

NEIGHBOR: I'm just saying, it's your tree.

WRITER: Yes?

NEIGHBOR: So the tree's branches are also yours, but they were sticking over my yard.

WRITER: That's fine, I don't mind that you sawed them off.

NEIGHBOR: But they're yours.

WRITER: What are you trying to say?

NEIGHBOR: If say, your dog walked into my yard and I returned it to you...

WRITER: I don't have a dog

NEIGHBOR: Fine, but let's say you had a dog and it walked into my yard and I returned  
it to you.

WRITER: So?

NEIGHBOR: I'm just saying, these branches are yours too, you're responsible for them.

WRITER: But I didn't saw them off. If I had sawn them off I would have thrown them away too.

NEIGHBOR: But they were sticking over my yard.

WRITER: If they bothered you and you sawed them off, then you're also responsible for clearing them away.

NEIGHBOR: But they're from your tree

WRITER: Then if those are my branches you have no right to saw them off.

NEIGHBOR: But they were sticking out over my yard

WRITER: So?

NEIGHBOR: They were bothering me, they made it shady.

WRITER: And why are you tying that sun shade to the tree, isn't it to have shade?

NEIGHBOR: It's not the same shade.

[*Pause*]

WRITER: Look, I don't mind the fact that you sawed branches off my tree, and I don't mind the fact that you entered my yard without permission, and I don't mind the fact that you're tying your sun shade to my tree, all I'm asking is that you clear away the branches you sawed off.

NEIGHBOR: No.

WRITER: What do you mean, no?

NEIGHBOR: For years your tree's branches shaded my yard, and for years your tree's branches dropped leaves into my yard, covering my flowerbeds and dirtying up my swimming pool, and now, when I finally decided that I'm sick of cleaning up, after I understood that you're not going to do anything about this nuisance yourself, I finally cut down these filthy branches myself, you come over and make demands?

WRITER: You know what? If you don't want to clear away the branches, fine. Leave them. [*Turns to leave*] and just please, when you get off the ladder, please mind the flowers.

NEIGHBOR: I see 'em. [*To himself*] Philistine.

WRITER: [*Stops for an instant, considers whether to respond or not, finally turns back to the Neighbor*] What did you say?

NEIGHBOR: Nothing.

WRITER: Nothing?

NEIGHBOR: Nothing, it's just that, after all I said I was expecting...

WRITER: Expecting what?

NEIGHBOR: I was expecting an apology.

WRITER: An apology? What do I have to apologize for?

NEIGHBOR: For what your tree did to my yard.

WRITER: What the tree did? The tree did what trees do, I'm not responsible for what the tree does.

NEIGHBOR: But it's yours.

WRITER: So what?

NEIGHBOR: If say, your dog went into my yard...

WRITER: I already told you I don't have a dog.

NEIGHBOR: Fine, but let's say you had a dog and I went into my yard and took a shit, wouldn't you apologize?

WRITER: I'd apologize.

NEIGHBOR: So? Your tree has been shitting in my yard for years, don't you think you should apologize for that?

WRITER: But the tree also gave you shade.

NEIGHBOR: And who says I want shade?

WRITER: You're putting that thing up to have shade.

NEIGHBOR: It's not the same shade.

WRITER: and if this tree wasn't here, you'd have nowhere to tie this sun shade.

[*Pause*]

NEIGHBOR: So you're not going to apologize?

WRITER: I don't have to apologize. If anything you're the one who should apologize for sawing branches off my tree without approval, for entering my yard without permission, and for tying things to my tree without asking.

NEIGHBOR: I did all of these things only because you left me no other choice, you and your tree pushed my back to the wall, after suffering from your tree for years I finally understood that you're not going to lift a finger to solve this.

WRITER: Solve this? I didn't even know there was a problem.

NEIGHBOR: Ignorance is no defense.

WRITER: Excuse me?

NEIGHBOR: If say, your dog went into my yard...

WRITER: I don't have a dog.

NEIGHBOR: Let's say you had a dog and every day it went into my yard and took a shit, let's say every day for years he went into my yard and took a shit, and you didn't do anything about it...

WRITER: But if I didn't know...

NEIGHBOR: Didn't know what? Are you that stupid? Don't you know what a dog is? Don't you know what dogs do? If you're so irresponsible you shouldn't even be allowed to have a dog!

WRITER: I don't have a dog!

NEIGHBOR: You shouldn't be allowed to have a tree either!

[*Pause. The Neighbor finishes tying the sun shade.*]

WRITER: You know what, I'm sick of arguing, if it means that much to you, no problem, fine, I apologize. [*Somewhat cynically*] I'm sorry that my tree's branches shaded your yard, and I'm sorry that leaves from my tree fell into your yard.

NEIGHBOR: Apology accepted.

WRITER: but just, really, the flowers...

NEIGHBOR: I see 'em.

WRITER: Thank you. [*Turns to leave*]

NEIGHBOR: And what about compensation?

WRITER: What?

NEIGHBOR: Compensation for what your tree did.

WRITER: What compensation?!

NEIGHBOR: If say, your dog....

WRITER: I don't have a dog!

NEIGHBOR: But let's say...

WRITER: No but! I have no reason to compensate you for something I didn't do.

NEIGHBOR: Wait a minute, if you're saying you didn't do anything then what did you apologize for just a minute ago?

[*Descends ladder, stand only a few paces away from the Writer.*]

Are you telling me that was a fake apology? That it was meaningless? That you don't stand by what you say?

WRITER: I...

NEIGHBOR: I knew it, you're not a man, you're just a worm. You're willing to talk and blabber but when it really comes down to it you don't care about fairness or justice.

WRITER: You want justice? Fine, if the tree wronged you then you've already punished it. You punished it by sawing off its branches – a serious corporal punishment, to which you've also added community service – to hold up your sun shade.

NEIGHBOR: Even if I accept your claim about the tree's punishment, there's nothing in it for me, the victim. Punishment is one thing and compensation is another.

WRITER: You got shade.

NEIGHBOR: I had shade before.

WRITER: It's not the same shade. [*Pause*] And in any case, since justice is such a big issue for you, I'm sure you received some satisfaction from sawing off the branches.

NEIGHBOR: Satisfaction is... hard to measure. I really thought that cutting off the branches would give me some satisfaction, but afterwards I felt this wasn't enough.

WRITER: So what else do you want?

NEIGHBOR: I want to feel that justice has been done.

WRITER: And what will make you feel that justice has been done?

NEIGHBOR: Hard to say. [*Pause*] Let's say that cutting off the branches in some way compensates for the shade, there are two other issues that have to be addressed – the leaves dirtying my pool, and covering my flowers.

WRITER: So what do you want?

NEIGHBOR: I think the appropriate thing would be for me to trample your flowers and pee in your pool.

WRITER: What?

NEIGHBOR: It seems only fair.

WRITER: First of all, I don't have a pool, and second, there is no way I'm letting you trample my flowers.

NEIGHBOR: That's really a problem, about the pool.

WRITER: I'm not letting you trample my flowers!

NEIGHBOR: What if, instead of peeing in the pool I pee on you?

WRITER: What?

NEIGHBOR: I'm reminding you, we're talking about years of dirt.

WRITER: Yes, leaves, not urine!

NEIGHBOR: Fine, you know what? Because it's you and not a pool I'm willing to replace the peeing with spitting. I want to spit in your face.

WRITER: What do leaves in a pool have to do with spitting in someone's face?

NEIGHBOR: I'll admit, it's a bit of a stretch, but I think that if you let me do this I'll really feel satisfaction, I'll feel fully compensated for dirtying the pool.

WRITER: And what about the flowers?

NEIGHBOR: Flowers are a different issue, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Dirt for dirt and flowers for flowers.

WRITER: If say, just for a minute let's say, in theory, that I let you spit in my face, is there a chance this might be enough and you could forget about trampling the flowers?

NEIGHBOR: I don't know...

WRITER: You have to understand, these flowers are really important to me, they inspire me, I look at them every day when I sit and write.

NEIGHBOR: Sit and write? What are you, a poet?

WRITER: I'm a playwright.

NEIGHBOR: A playwright? Interesting, I could get a lot of satisfaction from spitting in the face of a playwright.

WRITER: So you agree? You'll forget about the flowers?

NEIGHBOR: I can't commit one hundred percent, but I think that spitting in your face would really satisfy me.

WRITER: Fine, if you're willing to forget about the flowers, I'm willing to get spit in the face.

*[The Neighbor moves closer to the Writer, examines him from various angles, as if weighing his options, and finally spits on him.]*

WRITER: *[Wipes his face]* fine. If that settles it...

NEIGHBOR: No.

WRITER: What do you mean no?

NEIGHBOR: I still want to trample your flowers.

WRITER: But you said...

NEIGHBOR: I said I can't commit one hundred percent.

WRITER: But you still spat in my face.

NEIGHBOR: Yes, and I feel that's adequate compensation for the pool, but the flowers...

WRITER: And how did you get from leaves gently falling on your flowers to roughly trampling mine?

NEIGHBOR: I'm reminding you, this is years of dirt.

WRITER: But I told you how important these flowers are for me.

NEIGHBOR: Maybe that was your mistake. If I hadn't known, maybe I would have let it go. But the minute you told me that these flowers are so important to you trampling them seemed a lot more significant than spitting in your face. Even while I was spitting in your face I was thinking about the flowers.

WRITER: But...

NEIGHBOR: And you went on and on, telling me how you look at them every day, that they inspire you, and I thought, what's more important for a playwright, his dignity or his inspiration? Humiliation is a daily occurrence but inspiration is rare.

*[Pause. The Writer opens his mouth as if to speak but no voice comes out.]*

And maybe it seems like this is more a punishment for you than compensation for me, because what do I care about your flowers, or your inspiration, but you have to understand, every time I raked leaves in my yard or fished them out of my pool I was cursing your tree, and you too, in a way, and now I feel that I would get the greatest satisfaction from trampling your flowers. It would give me a feeling of sweet revenge after years and years of injustice.

*[Moves near the flowers, looks over at the Writer.]*

You have no idea how sweet this moment is, the moment just before...

*[The Neighbor hesitates for another moment, then begins trampling the flowers methodically, raising his legs high up and stomping, jumping on the flowers, kicking them, and tearing them up with his hands. After about 30 or 40 seconds of this his pace slows until he is finally standing between the trampled flowers looking a bit defeated.]*

WRITER: Is that it? Are you done? Do you feel satisfied?

NEIGHBOR: Satisfaction is complicated. *[Pause]* I really thought that trampling your flowers would satisfy me, but now...

WRITER: Now you feel empty.

NEIGHBOR: Yes...

WRITER: For me, these flowers were important, but for you they were just flowers.

NEIGHBOR: Yes...

WRITER: You trampled them because you thought this would give you some meaning, that the meaning they have for me would somehow transfer to you, but...

NEIGHBOR: [*Shakes his head*] Nothing.

WRITER: No feeling of relief, no sweet revenge, just a series of meaningless actions.

*[The Writer approaches the Neighbor sympathetically, almost placing a hand on his shoulder. The Neighbor looks at him angrily and pushes him away. The Writer retreats but the Neighbor grabs him by his clothes, the two struggle and fall to the ground. The Neighbor gains the upper hand, pins the Writer to the ground and beats him. He finally gets up and exits hurriedly, tossing a hateful glance at the tree. A few second later the Writer stirs, gets up, and totters back to his table. He takes the pen in his hand, stares at the trampled flowers, and begins writing.]*

**END**