

Over the Back Fence  
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Dogs and horses  
By Alva Wood

When the weather finally warms up and the snow starts melting away, it reveals all the piles of dog poop that got covered up by successive snowfalls all through the winter.

People enjoying a walk in the balmy spring air tread carefully, tippy-toeing around doggie droppings as if they were landmines.

Conscientious dog owners carry extra bags with them, picking up some past dumps as well as the current one.

As a good citizen and dog owner, Ray Hiebert goes out every spring and cleans up the messes that his black Labrador Snork has left behind. There are always more than he expected.

He knew that there would be, because Snork bounds through the deep snow like a snow blower gone berserk, and then suddenly the flurry of snow stops, and Ray knows Snork is doing something out there, but Ray is damned if he's going to wade through thigh deep snow to find a pile of warm doggie-doo that's already melting its way down to ground level.

But even he was surprised at how many little piles there were on his lawn. And on his neighbours' lawns. Snork just doesn't understand about property lines.

Ray had filled two plastic grocery bags when Agatha Whimsey and her husband Peter rode by on their horses.

That's another annual rite of spring. Hobby farmers get antsy about taking their hobby horses out for a trot, as soon as it's warm enough not to freeze their butts to the saddle.

Like quite a few others, Agatha and Peter bought an acreage in our village a few years ago, after River City started enforcing some long-forgotten bylaws about keeping livestock within city limits. The bylaw was intended to restrict feedlots for cattle and pigs, and assembly lines for chickens. But technically, livestock includes horses and ponies.

Forced to choose between their horses and their friends, Agatha and Peter, naturally, chose their horses. They moved out to a less restrictive locale.

Agatha and Peter clippety-clop along the side of the road. They stop by Ray's lawn for a chat. Having a chat with a lofty rider on horseback is like trying to debate with a minister in an old time pulpit, raised six feet above contradiction. But at least Agatha makes an attempt to be sociable.

"G'day," she says, looking down on Ray and his plastic bags.

"Nice day for a ride," says Ray, scooping up another pile.

"Indeed," Agatha agrees. "Our horses are feeling their oats, so to speak."

It was supposed to be a figure of speech. But that moment, Peter's horse hoists its tail and passes a steaming pile of those oats through its digestive system.

"I commend you," says Agatha condescendingly, "for cleaning up after your dog. It doesn't bother the horses, of course, but I find the casualness of some owners about the messes their pets leave behind quite distressing."

In sympathy, Agatha's horse adds its own pile of semi-composted fertilizer to the end of Ray's driveway.

"There can be few things less attractive when taking a stroll through the woods," continues Agatha grandly, "then having to stop to clean one's hiking boots because some person has been so inconsiderate as to leave canine feces on the trail."

Peter's horse releases a stream of urine that rivals the flow of many village hydrants. Ray watches it dribble down his driveway towards his garage.

"Well, we must be off," says Agatha. "Nice talking with you, Mr. Uhhhhh..."

"Wait," says Ray. "I have something you need."

As the horses stamp their feet impatiently, Ray walks down to his garage. He comes back with a large garbage bag.

"Here," he says, handing it to Agatha. "If you think horseshit is any less offensive than dogshit, you're as full of it as your horses are."

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