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Tough Enough

“Just lend me ten bucks, John,” Jessica begged. “Come on!”

“I’m sure the shirt is very cute and pink and perfect, sis, but I don’t have any money.

Now move—I gotta mow the lawn.”

“In this heat?” she asked, fanning herself with manicured nails.

“You know, Mom and Dad pay me ten bucks to mow the lawn,” John said.

“Oh! So you can lend me the money after you finish?”

He snorted. “Yeah, right. I’ll let you *mow the lawn*, though.”

“No way! That mower’s heavy!” Jessica said, her eyes wide.

“What’s that I hear? Oh, it’s the sound of a thousand cute tops crying!”

“Shut up and show me how this thing works,” she snapped. They went to the garage, and John pulled out the mower for her.

“So, I just pull the cord?” She pulled tentatively, and the mower let out a brief, unnerving growl. Jessica jumped back and let out an “Eep!”

“It’s fine, Jess. Pull as hard as you can,” John said. Jessica braced herself and pulled. The mower roared to life. Her confident look amused John.

“Good job!” he hollered. “Go to it!”

“Wait!” she squeaked, but he was gone. She took a deep breath and nudged the mower forward a few inches. It made a hideous *crrrunch* as twigs were chewed and spat out. She

shrieked, thinking of how “cute” she would look with missing toes. The mower kept roaring, and she realized that she didn’t know how to turn it off.

“John!” she shouted, but there was no way he could hear her. She nudged the evil machine forward and watched the grass spew out the side. It was kind of cool. Terrifying, but cool.

She kept pushing all the way to the other side of the lawn. The mower was heavy, but she was strong enough. Turning around was another issue. Still, she was tough, even if she liked pink. She pushed down on the handle, and the mower tilted up. Her tense muscles relaxed, and she let out a loud sigh. No longer muffled by the grass, the mower’s chainsaw roar increased to jackhammer level. Slowly, she turned, and then she pushed forward to mow the next strip of grass. The shaggy grass fell as she mowed. By the time she got to the end of the lawn, she had perfected the turning technique so that it was one fluid motion.

No longer afraid of the mower, she moved her sweaty face closer to examine the controls. She found the switch and cut the engine.

John emerged from inside and surveyed the lawn. “Nice job, Jess.”

“Thank you. Excuse me, but I have money to collect, a shower to take, and a top to buy,” she said, as she walked past him.

When Jessica got to the dance that night, her friend Alice was still setting up, placing a vase filled with flowers on each table.

“I’m really sorry I’m late,” Jessica said. “I had to do some last-minute clothes-shopping.”

“That’s okay,” Alice said. “We’re almost finished.” Then she noticed what Jessica was wearing. “Hey, I love your new top!”

“Really? Thanks.”

“Did your mom take you to buy it?”

“No, I bought it myself.”

“But I thought you’re broke.”

“Well,” Jessica said, “I did some work.”

Alice stared at her in disbelief. “Jess, *you* did some *work*?”

“Hey! What’s the big deal? I just mowed the lawn.”

“I didn’t know you could use a lawn mower,” Alice said. “Was that hard? Was it scary?”

“Not really.” Jessica remembered the motor’s roar, the flying chunks of twigs, and the hum of the powerful machine in her hands. “Maybe a little. Actually, it was cool.”

“Cool,” Alice said. “Well, can you help me set out these flowers on the rest of the tables?”

“Sure,” Jessica said.

They finished placing vases on the tables, and Alice turned to Jessica. “Look at all the flowers. Aren’t they beautiful?”

“They are,” Jessica replied, remembering her yard’s tall grass and thinking of how much fun it would be to mow right through an entire field of flowers, petals flying everywhere.