

This is a hand grenade.

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This hand grenade is made up of different parts. There are many different ways to make a hand grenade, but these are the parts of this one:

The pin. This is a piece of metal that is straight at one end and curled into a ring on the other. Before you throw the hand grenade, you insert your left pointer finger into the ring and pull it out.

This is when you make a decision.

The spoon. The spoon is the long piece of metal that runs down the length of the grenade. The spoon is released when you pull the pin. Gripping the spoon when you pull the pin will keep the hand grenade inactive. Once you release the spoon, the striker is released, and the hand grenade is live.

This is a decision already made.

The striker. We are inside the hand grenade now. The striker is a spring-loaded mini hammer that hits the percussion cap.

The percussion cap. The percussion cap makes a small spark when hit by the hammer. Think of the caps you put in cap guns that pop when you pull the trigger.

The fuse. The percussion cap ignites the fuse. The fuse burns slow, which is why it is sometimes referred to as the delay element. The fuse lasts four to six seconds. It burns down and ignites the detonator.

This is when things move fast.

The detonator ignites the explosive material around the sides of the grenade.

The explosive material creates an explosion that blows the grenade apart into shrapnel.

The shrapnel is made up of the shredded pieces of the grenade's skin. These pieces fly outward and embed in everything in the area. Sometimes grenades are also packed with serrated wire or metal pellets.

But this grenade is not.

Pin. Spoon. Striker. Percussion Cap. Fuse. Detonator. Explosion. Shrapnel.

This is all of a hand grenade or only the unimportant parts, depending who you ask.

This is Bob.

Bob prefers thinking of his life in reverse. That way it feels like a climb.

He steps further back and he's standing in a jail cell, drunker and drunker as the morning slips backwards to night.

He steps further back and he's reversing down an alley, bouncing his truck off the sides. Each time he mashes a fender into the bricks a part of his truck repairs itself until it comes shooting backwards out of the alley in perfect shape except for the garbage floating under the chairs.

He steps back and his wife swerves her car back onto their street, peeling out in reverse, smoke swirling into screeching tires.

He's blowing the length back into a cigarette.

There is a joke about playing a country song backwards and getting your life together. Bob gets the joke. But he doesn't really think a man would get used to backwards guitars or harmonies. Bob thinks it's more like his high school English teacher who told him to read all his papers backwards to check for misspellings. He said it was easier if old things looked new and different.

This is looking for mistakes, not punchlines.

Bob sometimes walks through his apartment backwards and looks at the clock. He tries to say words backwards.

Time backwards is emit.

This is Bob tracing Einstein to find comfort.

This is Windmore.

Windmore is a town you can drive across on a mouthful of gas.

Windmore tries to keep itself a secret. That means the only stripmall is near the highway. It means bright porch lights flooding wide driveways. It means everyone leaves for work and everyone leaves for weekends. It means that Mexicans who work in the strip mall drive home. Home somewhere else.

This is the expectation of fresh produce.

Windmore is a golf cart community. This means golf carts are legal on streets where the posted speed is under 40.

All the roads are posted under 40.

This is a town too small for its money.

This is a can of Diet Peach Split.

The can is bright pink with peaches dancing circles around the outside. It is store brand, forty cents.

Bob buys single cans of Diet Peach Split. He doesn't care for the taste of it. The one day he drank it, he spit out the fizzing soda with hot vomit right on its heels. It didn't help that Diet Peach Split is always warm. Even hot. The cans of Diet Peach Split rest near the refrigerator motor in the soda machine. On July days, the cans are hot to the touch. On July days he wants to drive his cart and drink beer.

Bob pulls a Swiss Army knife from his pocket and picks the can opener out from its bed.

With the can opener he jabs at the can until he pulls the top and twists it off the can. He shakes big drops of soda from the shell, then drops a beer can right in the top. The Diet Peach Split can is just the right size, a little bigger than the beer can nested inside.

This is Bob drinking beers while driving his golf cart.

This is a lot more like drinking than it is driving.

This is the lamp in front of Bob's house.

It is 55" tall. The lantern portion, from the bottom of the glass to the top is 8". It holds a 60-watt frosted bulb.

It is supposed to be between 50" and 60." It is. It is supposed to house a 40-60 watt bulb. It does. It is supposed to have a lantern portion of 6"-7". It has 8".

The lamp has been designated as unsuitable by the Homeowner's Association that manages Bob's neighborhood.

Bob put the lantern in himself. He called before digging to check for wires and pipes. He dug out a hole with a posthole digger, set the pole in concrete, and set a small level on top, tilting the lamp back towards the house until the small oblong bubble rested dead center. He let the concrete dry overnight before screwing in a bulb. At Christmastime he would screw in a green bulb that he kept in its original box in the garage during the rest of the year. The Homeowner's Association objected to this as well, but backed off the issue when Bob brought to the next meeting a blue bulb he threatened to screw in in observance of Hanukah.

This is Bob's newest problem with the Home Owner's Association.

This is not Bob's first problem with the Home Owner's Association.

He's had many before.

Most famous was the curb painting scandal of the previous year.

A boy came by the house and said he would paint the house numbers on the curb for ten dollars. For an additional two dollars, a full-color American flag could be added as well.

Bob didn't need to hear it, but he let the boy go on about how the numbers help visitors, delivery drivers, and others, but they could also save your life when an emergency crew was searching for your home. Bob didn't need to hear all that, but he thought it best to let the boy try out the words.

Bob paid the ten dollars for the numbers and the two for the American flag. The boy finished the numbers in a few minutes. Bob was bringing coke for the boy when he saw the last two numbers were flip-flopped, three-eight instead of eight-three.

He let the kid finish, gave him his coke, his money, and a tip. He pulled white and black paint out of the garage. He pried up the lids. He fixed the numbers and then let them set. He put plastic bags over the openings of the paint cans before punching down the lids to keep them from sticking.

That afternoon Bob got a special invitation to an Emergency HOA meeting. Bob washed up but didn't dress in anything special.

The main topic was the numbers on Bob's curb. This is why we hire professionally only, one man, a man in sandals, said.

Bob said the numbers were already fixed.

The other men said it looked bad.

Bob said that was his business.

This is Bob pulling the pin.

The other men disagreed. They said the numbers were cheap-looking, ugly and brought down the tone of the neighborhood.

This is Bob releasing the spoon.

Bob said he would agree to remove the numbers if his neighbor moved out. He said the neighbor in question, the man in sandals, was cheap-looking, ugly, and that he brought down the tone of the neighborhood.

The men said they could remove the numbers for Bob if need be.

Bob made it clear that would need be.

After walking home, Bob called in a favor. The next morning several hundred pounds of gravel had been dumped at the end of his driveway. The gravel covered the numbers. It would take some serious shoveling to get them fresh air.

By the time the HOA decided to take their anger out through Bob's lantern, he had decided that he had very little use for the whole thing.

This is Bob controlling something.

This is Bob's Swiss Army knife.

It contains a long blade, a short blade, small scissors, a can opener, a bottle opener, and a corkscrew.

Bob's wife purchased it based on a joke that Bob couldn't remember anymore. Something about if a Swiss Army knife could fuck it would run humanity out of business and nobody would need a wife anymore.

It was something like that, but funnier.

This, of course, was before Bob's wife actually did leave the following September. It's one of the things that didn't mean anything at the time, but now that she's gone he wished he hadn't said it, even as a joke.

In his backwards life she is always walking in the door, right heel first.

He uses the large blade occasionally, but he keeps the smaller blade sharper. The small scissors he uses for cutting his nails mostly. The corkscrew has far fewer miles on it than the bottle opener. The can opener he uses mostly to scratch deep etchings of swastikas, curse words, and crude images of people fucking into the golf carts belonging to the people in his HOA.

Beer spills from Bob's mouth back into the camouflaged can. The can opener scrapes along the side of a golf cart and lays paint in the small grooves that used to be a jagged drawing of a penis with enormous balls underneath. Beer spills back into the can and Bob's wife takes another step back in the door.

This is Bob tallying mistakes like an English teacher.

This is Bob finding the hand grenade.

Bob had never seen the box before she left. It was filled with the sorts of things that embarrass the owner but others find endearing and sometimes just mysterious. There are scraps of paper, napkins, a cocktail umbrella. There is one Converse shoe, baby-sized and filled with a baggie of magenta pills that have the burnished coating of matte photos instead of the normal sheen pills are supposed to have. Next to the shoe is a set of baby jars filled with rainwater. Sometimes Bob's wife would collect the rainwater. He unscrewed the lid and sipped one. It was labeled Rain in the Sunshine, but more than that it tasted of the mashed carrots that lived in the jar before.

Baby backwards is ybab.

This is Bob learning about his wife.

This is where Bob found the hand grenade.

He had no idea where she got it. Or why. He didn't know if she had it since she was twelve or bought it just before she passed. She was not a collector of weapons or war memorabilia. The closest thing they had to a deadly weapon was the BB gun they took turns firing at bottles in their backyard until it was dark enough that Bob ran into the house and picked up a flashlight, the two of them trading the flashlight for the BB gun after every shot and each pointing, aiming like a two-man firing team.

Bob still has the BB gun hanging above the fireplace. Sort of a joke. The ketchup bottle he washed out and refilled with BB's, the one they used to squeeze the BB's through the small opening into the gun's stock, also sits on the mantle.

Bob threw out the scraps of paper. He threw out the shoe and flushed all but one of the pills down the toilet. The toilet coughed back a handful of the pills and he flushed again and again until they shot down without swirling back. He threw out the jars, jammed all of them in the trash. He kept the hand grenade.

This is saying Thanks instead of Why.

This is Bob pulling the work notice from his front door.

The notice is pink and wedged in the screen door. Bob is angry that it is there, angry he didn't hear someone leave it.

The notice, typed especially for this occasion, informs Bob that men will be coming to replace his lamp. They will come tomorrow. They will charge him fifty-eight dollars and forty-eight cents to replace the lamp. The name of the company is on the bottom.

This is someone pulling the pin from another man's grenade.

This is a hand grenade.

This is Bob walking towards the lamp with the grenade in his pocket.

This is Bob pulling his Swiss Army knife from his pocket and using the small blade to unscrew the lid from the top of the lamp.

This is Bob unscrewing the light bulb and taking a moment to consider the lightbulb, rattling it in his hand.

This is Bob removing the pin from the grenade while holding the spoon in place.

This is the grenade safe and not safe.

This is Bob setting the grenade in the lamp.

This is the glass side of the lamp tight against the spoon.

This is the 1/5" of glass holding the grenade together.

This is the 1/5" of glass stopping the spoon from releasing.

This is the 1/5" of glass stopping spoon stopping the striker, stopping the percussion cap, stopping the fuse, stopping the detonator, stopping the explosive material.

This is Bob screwing the lamp top back in place, cranking it down and then stripping the screw.

This is Bob apologizing to his wife for going through her things.

This is the beginning and the ending.

This is a hand grenade.