

Arthur Mortensen

UFO

To the memory of Ray Bradbury

The barn occluding Mabel Johnson's yard
Appeared one morning, unannounced, and perfect:
Red walls; tin roof; white-painted window frames;
Two well-hayed stalls equipped with nervous horses
Face deep in bags of oats, their big eyes tracking
Old Mabel's neighbor kids, whose parents swore
Their perfect children never saw a thing.
That mystery, though, was not their real complaint.
The truth, they said, she'd let things go to pot:
Herself, lawn, yard: the City Manager
Proposed a fix: 'We'll hire her to work
To beautify surrounding plots.' We voted.
Jack's brief proposal passed without a hitch,
With me dispatched to Mabel Johnson's house.
'How interesting,' she said, and closed the door,
Extinguishing the porchlight, leaving me
To stumble down the darkened, wooden steps.
Come morning, though, and out she came with clippers.
She wore a brilliant floral print so new
The tags fluttered like flags as she passed by
To cross a lawn to where a single rose
Stood out against a thorny, untrimmed bush.
'We had a miracle in my front yard,'
She said, 'and all you think about is how
To occupy my time?' She burst out laughing,
Snipped off the rose, put it behind her ear,
Then marched past startled neighbors to the barn.
At once the structure bloomed bright white and vanished,
Leaving behind an unkempt, dying lawn,
And a small white house with every window open.