

## With My Own Eyes

This Cherry Dr. Pepper is amazingly smooth. I cannot help but think about it as it washes down my throat, the cherry carbonated flavored liquid flowing past my teeth, my dry tongue, coating my esophagus and traveling down the anatomical pathways to my stomach. As I stand in the warming sun, a pair of garden shears in my left hand, wearing my worn and very comfortable sandals, faded shorts, and blue shirt with two stains dead center in the middle (the ghostly remnants of nachos from last year's Super bowl party), I close my eyes a moment and tilt my head to let the sun spread its UV rays over my skin. Saturday is unlike any other day of the week. The pressures of work vaporized; the kids still half asleep on the couch, watching morning cartoons and picking their noses – the prospect of school erased from their worries; my wife reading the paper at the kitchen table, carefree and relaxed, checking out the shopping specials while savoring a hot cup of fresh coffee; my own to-do lists of chores finally scratched off. I breathe a sigh of relief, ready to tackle the tasks for the day. Listening, I hear birds chirping, the swaying of trees and leaves shuddering, the squeaking of the neighbor's swing set, distant cars on roads beyond the subdivision, dogs barking as they sound out indecipherable calls to each other, and a lawn mower, its annoying whirring motor sound announcing that spring is here.

I open my eyes and take another sip of the Cherry Dr. Pepper and just as I test the garden shears, a disturbing spider lurches out from beneath the shrubs and it scurries across the driveway. I am repulsed by the sight of it and I watch as it darts away and for a brief moment I consider stabbing it with my shears, but then it disappears underneath a crack of the house. Then a large cloud eclipses the sun and I begin to look up to see if the day may be ruined by rain. But the cloud breaks apart just as suddenly as it appeared and random shards of sun rays shoot down, dispersing over the neighborhood. A wind picks up and the trees toss energetically to and fro. Squinting from the spiraling particles of dust, I sneeze and drop the shears onto the ground. Amazed that I am still holding my Cherry Dr. Pepper, I start to bend down to pick up the shears before I am quickly distracted by a blur of motion across the street and I see it is a child, riding a bike, as he charges out from the driveway into the street in front of an oncoming car. The car swerves and screeches and manages to avoid nearly crashing into a trash receptacle on the sidewalk. I freeze with the Cherry Dr. Pepper in mid air watching as the child looks back with a ridiculous grin, completely oblivious to the near fatal wreck he almost caused; the driver shouting expletives inside his air conditioned car, a finger wagging that should never be waved at anyone younger than sixteen. I watch as the child, with a surge of newfound mischievous confidence, darts out in front of the car again, and the driver

slams on the breaks once more, his face reddened and lips pursed, spitting out muffled words to make any church going person cringe.

The child laughs, pumping the bike pedals with his legs as fast as he can, and disappears around the bend. The driver, still fuming behind the steering wheel, the car parked askew in the middle of the street, notices me in the front yard, an inadvertent spectator to this clash between adult and child worlds. He glowers at me; his grimacing face contorted as he shakes his head and regains his composure. He slowly drives forward righting the car and keeping watch as if he is some kind of child-bike-riding patrolman.

The front door opens at the green house diagonal from mine and Mr. Livadous wanders out wearing his bathrobe which barely covers him. Underneath the flapping robe, I see his t-shirt and red-striped boxers and he has on tube socks stretched up to the bottom of his knees and black slippers on his feet and the wind rifles his neatly trimmed moustache. He suspiciously eyes the man driving the car past his manicured lawn and stoops to pick up the newspaper

Around the bend of the street, a mini van passes by the car and without warning, a miniature Daschund, determinedly chasing a terrified cat, dart out in front of them. Both the mini van and the car screech and swerve to avoid hitting the animals and each other. Miraculously, the cat leaps onto the top of the minivan, the miniature Daschund is rendered stupid at the cat's escape and I see the woman driving the minivan look around horror stricken, while the man in the car topples over the daffodils in Mr. Livadous front yard before speeding off. Mr. Livadous yells after the man in the car, tossing the newspaper in the general direction, which accidentally hits and flies off the roof of the minivan, the cat screeches and hisses and latches onto the bike rake with his claws. The minivan passes by me and I offer a reluctant wave to tell the woman to stop, but she doesn't seem to notice me, too busy instead glancing at the two children in the back seat as if they may be scarred forever from the Dashund cat-chasing-newspaper flying encounter.

And before the woman can escape from this suddenly too dangerous neighborhood, the Burke boys from the pink house with blue shutters, who resemble something out of *Where the Wild Things Are*, already in the midst of practicing their slingshot hurls, accidentally target the minivan. A splintering crack forms down the center of the driver side window and I hear various screams intermingled together and I see the woman fling her hands in the air and the minivan sputters out of control and smashes into the fire hydrant. The boys stand frozen, mouths agape and dumb looks on their faces, like Tweedledee and Tweedledum, completely conscious of the gravity of their situation and they stumble backwards, retreating into their Barbie doll house-like fortress. I stand in shock, a helpless witness as water gushes from the fire hydrant into the air assailing the front of the minivan.

Mr. and Mrs. Winchester, walking along the sidewalk and witnessing the spectacle unfold before them, try to jump out of the way and trample onto a fire ant mound on one of the lawns. They both scream and bumble out into the street, their hands frantically tearing off their clothes, and the woman driving the minivan flies out from the

driver's seat, momentarily shocked at the semi-naked people dancing in front of her, and somehow manages to grab both of her children under one arm and she rushes off down the road, eyes wild and a silent scream to match Mr. and Mrs. Winchester's real screams.

Before I have any time to grapple with the ridiculous events of the morning, the flurry of action that has just seized the subdivision on my comfortable relaxing day off, there is a fire engine in front of my driveway and the firemen stand shaking their heads and muttering in private conversations, baffled by the abandoned minivan and the punctured fire hydrant. My wife is beside me, one hand pressed to her lips and trying very hard not to laugh. Our children giggle and point and all the neighbors stand at their front doors or peer out from the safety of windows, some looking at me as if I have somehow caused this great commotion and I am embarrassed.

I take a sip of my Cherry Dr. Pepper to relax and I search about their faces, looking for some sympathy, but I see none. Then I notice Mrs. Mulberry standing at the foot of a tree in one of the yards by the gushing fire hydrant, clad in her pink slippers and pink terry cloth robe, her white hair still locked in curlers. Mr. Livadous is beside her offering assurance, but he seems more interested in checking out Mrs. Mulberry in her morning attire rather than offer her help. She is brushing him away and waving frantically at something in the air and then I glance up and I see the cat that was chased by the miniature Daschund. It rests on the edge of a tree branch, wet and hanging on for dear life and glaring at Mr. Livadous and Mrs. Mulberry and the madness of the street below. I feel sorry for Mrs. Mulberry and pray and hope the cat does not do something stupid like leap to the ground. A fireman notices Mrs. Mulberry's pleas and I see him stride over to where she stands and he takes control of the situation, waving off and shutting up Mr. Livadous, who reluctantly saunters back to his own house. The fireman calms Mrs. Mulberry down and then casually carries over a tall ladder and sets it against the trunk of the tree. Sipping my Cherry Dr. Pepper, I watch the fireman climb up toward the cat and when I glance up, the cat and I lock eyes.

As I stand there in place in my driveway, holding my Cherry Dr. Pepper, it seems to ask me with its large feline expression: How on earth did I end up at the top of this tree?