



The View from the Cherry Tree

By Willo Davis Roberts

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Then a flowerpot almost falls on him. And three bullets just miss him. And someone tries to poison his food.

When he tries to tell his family that he thinks there has been a murder, they are too busy with his sister’s wedding to care. Will Rob be the murderer’s next victim?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Willo Davis Roberts wrote many mystery and suspense novels for children during her long and illustrious career, including *The Girl with the Silver Eyes*, *The View from the Cherry Tree*, *Twisted Summer*, *Megan's Island*, *Baby-Sitting Is a Dangerous Job*, *Hostage*, *Scared Stiff*, *The Kidnappers*, and *Caught!* Three of her children's books won Edgar Awards, while others received great reviews and other accolades, including the Sunshine State Young Reader's Award, the California Young Reader's Medal, and the Georgia Children's Book Award.

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The View From the Cherry Tree

One

From his perch in the cherry tree Rob Mallory could see into the houses on either side. It was the Mallorys' tree, but it was closest to Mrs. Calloway's house; right up against it, as a matter of fact, and one of the numerous causes of problems with their neighbor.

It was into Mrs. Calloway's dining room that he was looking; behind him, at home, female voices came through the open windows. He couldn't understand what they were saying because they were all talking at once, but he knew, anyway. Something about the wedding. All anybody talked about these days was the wedding, like there was a law, or something, that made other subjects forbidden.

The day was warm enough for even Old Lady Calloway to open her windows, and the slight breeze stirred the heavy lace curtains so that he caught glimpses of the inside.

He had lived next door to Mrs. Calloway for nine of his eleven years, but he'd never been inside her house. When he was little, he'd believed the stories the older kids told, about how she caught kids and ate them, like the witch in *Hansel and Gretel*. Now he didn't believe that anymore, but he wouldn't have gone inside her house for anything.

Mrs. Calloway's rug was dark red, which ought to have been pretty, but it wasn't. He couldn't tell if it was dusty, but he imagined it smelled funny, the way the old lady herself did. The furniture was all old and funny looking, too, very dark and depressing.

As he sat with his back against a big limb, eating cherries and spitting out the pits, he saw Sonny creeping across the lawn toward Mrs. Calloway's house.

Sonny was twenty-two pounds of the meanest cat in the country.

Rob watched with interest as the cat approached the corner of the Calloway house. Mrs. Calloway hated cats, and Rob was supposed to keep Sonny away from her place, but what sense did that make? You couldn't police a cat all the time.

Sonny made the leap from lawn to limb in one long bound, sitting below Rob in the cherry tree for a moment, then inching out toward the blowing curtains in Mrs. Calloway's window.

Rob knew perfectly well that he ought to stop him. The old lady would have fits if Sonny landed in her dining room. That was his mother's phrase . . . somebody was always "having fits," or about to. He'd never actually seen it happen, and he couldn't think of a better place to see it than with Mrs. Calloway.

Sonny crouched at the end of the limb, his tail twitching, then still. The muscles bunched under the black pelt as he prepared to attack the curtains. And then Rob missed the action because out front a car horn sounded and he let it distract him for just a second. When he looked back, the curtains were still flapping, but Sonny was gone.

He waited, hoping something would happen. Like the old lady would start yelling, and maybe she'd froth at the mouth when she had her fit. That's what dogs did. He'd never seen one, but he'd heard about it.

The car horn was just old Max, and now he was coming around the side of the house toward the back door. You'd think Max would quit coming around all the time, now that Darcy was getting married to Steve.

Old Max was twenty-one, and for a grown-up he wasn't bad. He had a sense of humor, which was more than some of the rest of them had.

Rob threw a cherry pit, but it was too light; it fell short, so he pitched a whole cherry. The second one hit Max between the eyes.

Max paused, looking upward into the tree and stepping off the sidewalk. "That you, Robbie?"

"I'm a frog prince."

"No kidding. You do look sort of green at that, but I thought it was the reflection of the leaves. Where is everybody?"

"If you mean Darcy, she's having something altered. It's an emergency. Everything's an emergency at our house these days."

"Yeah. Okay if I go on in?"

"If it's not, they'll throw you out," Rob said. "That's what happens to me. It's not my fault they run around in their underwear, but they expect me to know when to open a door."

Max considered, nodded, said "Thanks," and rapped on the back screen door before entering the porch. "Anybody home? Are you all decent?"

There was a chorus of voices; his sister Teddi answered the door and let Max in.

Rob waited a little longer for something to happen in the Calloway house, then gave up. Maybe the old lady was taking a nap. She often took a nap, right when people wanted to use their mowers or play their stereos or something. No matter when you needed to make a noise, she was taking a nap.

He pictured Sonny stalking through the odd-smelling house, finding the bedroom, and leaping onto the old lady's chest. That would give her a fit, all right, if twenty-two pounds of cat landed on her!

He'd been eating cherries for half an hour, but he needed more than that. Cherries weren't very filling. He

wondered if they were ever going to have dinner. It was time somebody started cooking something if they were.

He slid down as far as he could go and then dropped onto the grass, his tennis shoes making no sound. Going in, he slammed the screen door, expecting someone would say something, but they were all too busy. Rob sighed. Nothing happened the way it was supposed to around here anymore.

The kitchen was empty. There wasn't anything cooking, no good smells coming from the oven. He opened the refrigerator door and debated whether it would be worth it to cut a slice off that cold ham. It was all fancied up and they'd be able to tell if he cut it. Usually his mother was fairly reasonable about such things, but these days it was hard to tell. He decided he'd better leave it alone and settle for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

The dining room was full of women, but they'd let old Max in, so they must all be dressed. Rob licked the oozing jelly from the edges of his bread and stood in the doorway, looking them over.

His older sister Darcy was the one getting married. You'd think she was a queen, or something, the way everybody waited on her and catered to her. Darcy had dark hair and blue eyes, like Mrs. Mallory, and while she just seemed like old Darcy to him she must be pretty because all these guys kept coming around, even after she was engaged to Steve. She was standing on a chair while her mother pinned a hem in her dress.

"Don't get that on anything, Robbie," Mrs. Mallory said. "And somebody answer that telephone."

Teddi, her long hair swirling as she spun, stretched across Max to reach the instrument on the table near the doorway. Because she was the one moving, Rob looked at her.

Teddi wasn't as pretty as Darcy, but he liked her better. Of course she was closer to his own age, being only six years older, and she didn't look down on him quite as much as the others did.

Teddi picked up the telephone and answered it.

"Yes? Mallory residence. Oh. Yes, Mrs. Calloway." She winced, holding the receiver away from her ear. "Yes. Yes. Yes, I understand. Yes, I'm sorry. I'm sorry." She looked at her mother, rolling her eyes until Mrs. Mallory rose and offered to take over for her. Teddi shook her head, then mouthed a final "Yes, I'm sorry" before she hung up. "Mrs. Calloway."

"We gathered that. What is it this time?"

"Couple of things. Max is parked on her garden hose. He's ruined it, she says. She'll have to have a new one, and he'll have to pay for it."

Max scowled. "I'm parked at the curb. Where's her crummy hose, in the street?"

Teddi shrugged. "I don't know. Besides that, Mom, Sonny got into her house."

A moan sounded through the room. Mrs. Mallory ran a hand over the lower part of her face. "All right. What did he break?"

"He walked across her bed after he'd knocked over a potted plant she'd just watered, and tracked mud all

over the spread. Then he ate one of her goldfish. An expensive variety. We owe her for that, too. She spilled the rest of them onto the floor while she was trying to chase him away, and it's no thanks to us that she didn't lose them all."

"Where's Sonny now?" Mrs. Mallory's mouth was a flat line as she went back to her task of pinning the hem.

"That's the final part. She threw him out, and he scratched her."

"Well, naturally," Max said. "He's not an idiot, that cat."

"She's going to have to have a tetanus shot, she's sure, and maybe rabies shots."

"Sonny's had his rabies shots," Mrs. Mallory said, jabbing angrily with a pin until Darcy protested. "Rob, I wish you'd find a way to keep that cat away from her."

Rob spoke around the final mouthful of peanut butter and jelly. "I can't watch him all the time. He just doesn't like Mrs. Calloway."

"Nobody likes Mrs. Calloway," Max agreed.

"It's the only thing I don't like about this house," Mrs. Mallory said. "Having her for a neighbor. Don't mention this latest ruckus to your father; he'll have a fit."

Rob tried to imagine his father having a fit and failed. "When are we going to eat?"

"What time is it? That late already? I'm going to have to stop pretty soon, Darcy."

"Not before this is finished, I hope!"

"I've got it pinned, now. You can do the hem yourself while I'm starting dinner."

"No, I can't, Mom. Steve's picking me up in fifteen minutes. We still have to go talk to Mr. Felton about the music. That has to be done tonight, so he knows what to play at the rehearsal tomorrow night."

"Well, take it off, and don't knock any pins out of it, and I'll see what I can do later. That confounded telephone has rung twenty times this afternoon; I'm beginning to want to tear it out of the wall." She answered it herself this time. "Yes, oh, is that you, Vivian? Yes, just a minute, let me get to the other phone."

Max helped Darcy down. "It's a shame, kid, you wasting yourself on that Sanderson bum. After all, you could have had me."

"Sorry, lamb," Darcy said. "Excuse me, I have to run. See you later."

Max let her go, and brought his gaze around to Teddi and smiled. "Dinner's going to be late around here. Why don't we go catch a bite at Dino's?"

Astonishment flashed over her face. "Me?"

Rob watched the byplay with mild interest. Outside the window he saw Sonny streaking up the trunk of the cherry tree to vanish into its secret places. He was all right, then. Too bad he'd had his shots; Old Lady Calloway deserved rabies or something.

"Sure, you. Maybe even the frog prince. How about it, your highness?"

Rob shook his head. "No, thanks."

"I'll ask Mom." Teddi grinned and took off for the den and the other telephone where her mother was speaking.

Max sighed. "I wonder how much that old bag thinks her hose was worth?"

"It was an old one," Rob said. "It leaked."

"Did it, now? I wouldn't be surprised if she laid it out where somebody'd have to run over it so she could get herself a new one."

"How old do you have to get before you drop dead of old age?"

Max laughed. "Older than that crone, I'm afraid. Although she's mean enough to poison herself on her own spit. Find me an ashtray, will you, sprout? This place is so cleaned up I don't dare touch anything."

Rob headed for the kitchen. He was reaching for the ashtrays stacked on the counter when he heard his father's footsteps on the back porch. The floor always creaked there under Walt Mallory's two hundred pounds.

Rob liked his father. They didn't talk an awful lot, but he wasn't a grouch like some kids' fathers.

He wore light gray work clothes, sweat-stained under the arms and across the back. He said, "Hiya, chum," and got himself a glass of iced tea out of the refrigerator. "What are we having for dinner?"

"I don't know. Nothing's started yet; they've all been fussing about Darcy's clothes."

"Where's your mother?"

"On the phone." He decided to spill some of the news. "Max parked on Old Lady Calloway's hose, and she says he has to buy her a new one. The one she had was wrecked already."

"She's a winner, that one." Mr. Mallory opened the refrigerator again and poked around. "You suppose it's safe to eat some of this salami?"

"Darcy did. But that's not saying anyone else can. If anybody ever fixes dinner around here, let me know, huh?"

He wandered back through the dining room, to where Max was standing with a handful of ashes, and passed along the ashtray. Max nodded without looking at him. He was busy looking at Teddi.

"What do you mean, you can't go? You're seventeen years old, for crying out loud! You can't go out to a

drive-in for a hamburger?"

"It's because of the wedding. Mom's about frantic, there's still so much to do. She wants us all to hang around to help with the loose ends."

"Even if you starve?"

"Oh, we'll throw something together." Teddi brightened. "Why don't you stay and eat with us? It won't be anything fancy, but you're welcome."

"I thought you'd never ask. Listen, is it safe to sit down anywhere except on a straight chair in this house?"

"Let's go out on the porch and sit in the swing. It's cooler."

Rob watched them go, then made his way down the hallway toward the front of the house. His mother was still talking on the telephone, sounding harassed, the way she had for the past month.

"There are only two categories things fall into around here now," she was saying. "Things that have to be done before the wedding, and things that can't possibly be squeezed in until afterward. I hope when Teddi decides to get married she elopes."

The living room was empty and pleasantly dim with the draperies drawn against the afternoon sun. Rob turned on the television and sprawled in a chair. After a few minutes Sonny came strolling through the cat-door from the front porch and leaped into the big recliner, settling down to wash himself.

"I hope you gave it to her good," Rob said. Sonny didn't pay any attention.

The doorbell rang. Rob waited, thinking surely someone else would get it. After awhile it rang again, and his mother shouted from the den, "Robbie! Get the door!"

He scuffed his feet through the shag carpeting, taking as long over it as he could. It was Derek Calloway. Rob stared at him through the screen door.

"Well, come on, let me in," Derek suggested.

Rob hunched his shoulders and unlatched the screen. "So come in. There's nobody around. Darcy's gone off someplace with Steve."

"I used to be a friend of the family. I thought." Derek was one of the grown-ups, too; he had been engaged to Darcy once, before Steve came along.

Rob padded back into the living room and flopped in his chair. Derek stood looking at the television for a moment.

"How come you got all their faces green?"

"I like green. I can pretend they're Martians."

"Oh. Is your mother around?"

“She’s in the den. On the phone.” Rob didn’t take his eyes off the screen.

“Teddi?”

“Out in the porch swing. With old Max.”

Small lines appeared in Derek’s forehead. “Is he here?”

“How else could he be in the swing with Teddi?”

Derek sighed. “You don’t mind if I go back and get myself a drink of water, do you?”

Rob shrugged. “Go ahead.”

As Derek turned to go, Sonny dove off the chair in front of him, tangling in Derek’s size-twelve shoes. The cat howled and spat. Derek swore and righted himself with an effort.

“Maybe Aunt Bea’s right about him. He’s a menace.”

“He probably thinks the same thing about guys with big feet. You been over there? To her house?” Derek’s Aunt Bea was Mrs. Calloway.

“Yeah. My mother sent her some fresh peas. I hear you’re in trouble again.”

“Oh? How’s that?”

“Cutting across the old gal’s lawn again. I should think you’d learn, Rob.”

“Oh, that was two days ago. And I didn’t cut across on purpose, Hal Stumper ran into me on his bike and knocked me over on her grass. How the heck could I help that?”

“Oh, is that the way it was? She made it sound like you were deliberately making a path across her corner. I should have known.” Derek stared glumly at the green faces on TV. He frowned at a jar with a punctured lid that sat atop the television set.

“What’s that?”

“My spiders.” Rob didn’t bother to keep the contempt out of his voice; anybody with one eye could see what was in the jar.

Derek shifted uneasily, moving away from them. “You sure collect the weirdest things. How can you stand to touch them?”

That didn’t even deserve an answer, so he didn’t make one.

“How come they’re sitting on the TV?”

“Because my mother said I had to get them out of my bedroom before Uncle Nick gets here. I don’t know why. He isn’t scared of spiders.”

“And she told you to put them in the living room?” Derek’s dark thick brows rose in disbelief.

“No, she said to get them out of my room.” He knew perfectly well his mother wouldn’t allow them to stay where they were while there was company in the house, but he hadn’t yet thought of a safe place to put them. “You wouldn’t want to keep them for a few days, would you?”

Derek shuddered. “I’d have nightmares with those things in the same room with me!” He stared a moment longer, then left the room.

Rob’s father came in, his hair dark red from being wet, freshly showered and changed into slacks and a sport shirt. “How come you got all their faces green?”

“I like green.”

“Well, I don’t.” Mr. Mallory twiddled with the TV, changing the complexions to magenta and finally to something nearer flesh tones. Then he fished the newspaper out of a stack of magazines on the coffee table. “This place is so neat you can’t find anything. The wedding is at the church, the reception is at the Country Club, so why does the house have to be so neat?”

“I don’t know. I think I’ll go outdoors for a while. It’s cooler. Be sure to call me when there’s something to eat, okay?”

“Okay,” his father agreed. “And for pete’s sake stay away from Old Lady Calloway, will you, chum?”

He didn’t know why they were always saying that to him. He never went near her on purpose. Never once, that he could remember, in his entire life had he gone near her on purpose.

Sonny followed him down the back steps. Maybe, Rob thought, he’d eat a few more cherries, just to keep from starving to death.

He liked it in the cherry tree. It was almost as good as Old Lady Calloway’s tower for keeping track of things. He could see both ways up and down the street, and into both houses, and across the street to the Comptons’ and the Devereauxs’.

The tower was a little better, he supposed, although he’d never been in it. It was the one thing about her house that he liked. It was a round tower that went up three stories, but the top ones were closed off. Mrs. Calloway sat at the lower floor level all the time to watch what was going on up and down the street.

The tower opened off one corner of Mrs. Calloway’s living room, and it had windows all around it. These were heavily hung with lace curtains so that unless it was night and she had the lights on it was hard to see into it. Mrs. Calloway sat in there during the day with her binoculars, and there wasn’t much that happened on Saraday Street that she didn’t know about.

Sonny didn’t join Rob in the tree. He went on out across the lawn to where Max’s car was still parked on Old Lady Calloway’s hose, and jumped in the window of the car.

“Hey! Get out of there!” Max got up from the porch swing, Teddi following, and they went out toward the street. “Come on, Old Boy, get out of my car. You’re too hard on the upholstery.”

Sonny was perched on the back of the front seat. He laid back his ears as they came up, and twitched his tail.

Max hesitated. "Get him out of there, will you, Teddi?"

"Come on, love. Come out," Teddi coaxed.

Sonny crouched lower.

"Where's Rob? He can always pick him up without getting scratched. Rob?" Max turned to call.

Rob spat out a pit and picked another cherry. Poor old chicken Max.

It took them a few minutes, but Teddi finally got the cat out, and Max ran up the windows to keep him from going back. While he was doing it, Mrs. Calloway came out onto her front steps and called down to them.

"Young man, your car has ruined my hose!"

She had a loud voice for such a little dried-up person. She looked a lot like the witch from Hansel and Gretel, Rob thought. Only he couldn't imagine her living in a gingerbread house, not a real one.

"You've got it hanging over the edge of the curb into the street," Max pointed out.

"You've ruined it. It's split; I can't use it anymore."

"It leaked before."

Mrs. Calloway advanced down the steps as if to take hold of him. "That's not so. A hose will cost me fifteen dollars. You'll have to pay for it; you can't expect to ruin people's property and not make it good."

"Mrs. Calloway, that hose wasn't worth anywhere near fifteen dollars. A new one wouldn't cost that much, even a better one than you had."

She took a different tack. "Always parking in front of my house, as if you owned the curb. You're visiting the Mallorys, park in front of their house."

"There isn't room in front of their house. Nobody ever parks in front of your house, and you don't have a car."

"That is hardly any concern of yours. I'll thank you to move the car and replace my hose, or I'll have the police on you."

Max stared at her for a moment, then touched Teddi's arm. "You do that, Mrs. Calloway. Come on, Teddi, let's go."

Sonny, still in Teddi's arms, spat at their neighbor when she came too near; the old woman retreated, muttering, and Max and Teddi came back into the yard, under the cherry tree.

"Do you think she'll do it? Call the police?"

Max made an exasperated sound. "Let her. For cripes sake, she doesn't own the street, and even if she had any company, I wouldn't be blocking all the parking! I did run over her crummy hose, after she put it in the gutter where I couldn't help it, so maybe I'll replace it, but I can get one cheaper than that. It's only a twenty-five footer, and it must be fifteen years old!"

"Maybe I'd better go in and see if Mom needs some help. She's about worn out. You want to come in? You're going to stay, aren't you?"

"Sure, I'll stay. Celebrate the end of an era."

"I guess Derek feels the same way. He's here, too; I see him looking out the window."

Rob picked another cherry and concentrated on spitting it as far as Mrs. Calloway's window. He'd never made it, but sometimes he got one as far as the sill.

He'd be glad when this blamed wedding was over, and they got back to normal around here.

Users Review

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Greta Harty:

The View from the Cherry Tree can be one of your starter books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in vocabulary, easy to understand, bit entertaining however delivering the information. The article author giving his/her effort to set every word into satisfaction arrangement in writing The View from the Cherry Tree but doesn't forget the main point, giving the reader the hottest in addition to based confirm resource info that maybe you can be one among it. This great information may drawn you into new stage of crucial pondering.

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