

Thirsty (or, The Longest Saturday)

By Scott Cimarusti

Tom Edwards exhaled a contented sigh of exhaustion as he entered the darkened kitchen. It felt like it was at least twenty degrees cooler inside and out of the reach of the merciless summer sun. He wiped his sweaty forearm across his even sweatier forehead and reached for a clean glass out of the dish drainer. Still reeling slightly from the dizzying heat, he backed up a step to push the glass against the ice dispenser built into the freezer door.

Nothing. Not even the disappointing impotent whirring of motors and the grinding of ice too stubborn to tumble into his waiting glass.

Damn ice-maker must have shit the bed like everything else in the house, it seemed. Which was why he was spending his Saturday morning busting his ass trying to make some headway with his seemingly never-ending list of household chores instead of golfing with his buddies.

To hell with it, Tom thought; one thing at a time. After spending the morning up on the roof in the baking sun, he needed a drink more than anything else at the moment. So he moved his glass under the faucet and jerked upward on the handle a little more forcefully than he should have.

Not a drop.

Tom's jaw dropped in fuming disbelief, and he almost dropped the glass in the sink.

What the—

He slammed the glass on the counter next to the sink—again, a little harder than he should have. Having to clean up a broken glass was the last thing he needed right now, with everything else he had to do.

The first thing he needed was a goddamned drink of water.

Tom headed for the downstairs bathroom, his mind racing. Did Carol forget to pay the water bill? Sure, money was tight in their household, as usual, but his wife made a point to pay the utilities first. With two school-aged daughters, they could not afford to be without water and electricity above all else.

Anyway, it was Saturday, he reasoned. He doubted the water company would shut off service on a weekend. Besides, he could remember making coffee this morning before he'd begun his chores. Plus, he hadn't seen any disconnection notices in the mail.

Unless Carol had hidden them or thrown them out.

Tom shook his head in a frustrated gesture. He was being ridiculous—his brains were clearly scrambled from too much sun while up on the second story roof cleaning out the gutters and trimming back tree branches. Shit—he might even have heatstroke, for Christ's sake.

Still... He would ask Carol about the water bill when she got home from shopping with the girls later this afternoon. Or maybe he would call her as soon as he got himself a godforsaken drink of water.

Tom barged through the downstairs bathroom door and jerked up on the faucet.

Nothing. Just like the kitchen sink.

Now he was furious.

Tom rounded the corner and loped up the stairs two at a time straight into the main bathroom at the top of the stairs that was primarily used by his daughters. The sink in this bathroom had two separate knobs—which was something the girls complained about, not being able to get the “perfect mix” of hot and cold water. Replacing the faucet with a single-handle

type was somewhere on his to-do list—moving rapidly toward the bottom of that list as his mind scrambled to figure out why there was no running water anywhere in the house.

Tom spun the cold spigot first. Nothing.

Then he tried the hot. Still nothing.

Gritting his teeth, he jerked open the shower curtain with the ducks-carrying-umbrellas pattern (what he wouldn't have given to be one of those ducks splashing in a cool puddle right now) and turned on the tub faucet.

Not a drop.

Incredulous to the point of completely forgetting his thirst for the moment, Tom stumbled out into the upstairs hallway. He briefly considered not even bothering to try the master bathroom because he expected more of the same—but he wound up checking the faucets in there, too, just to be thorough. And of course, he got the same result: zip.

He emerged from the master bedroom like a zombie, his heat-addled brain struggling to make some sense of why he just couldn't seem to get any water anywhere in his house.

Tom slowly descended the stairs, marveling at how cool it was even though he didn't hear the central air running. Considering how oppressively hot it was outside, he would have guessed the AC would have to run non-stop to keep the house this cool.

He quickly derailed that train of thought before it gained too much momentum. He would worry about the air conditioning later. He reasoned that it had to be working for the house to be as cool as it was. His priority at the moment was figuring out the water issue.

Instead of turning left at the bottom of the stairs to go back into the kitchen, Tom veered to the right toward the front room where his desk was tucked in the corner by the front window. He needed to call Carol, he decided—if for no other reason than to hopefully get some reassurance from her that he wasn't losing his mind.

He made a beeline for his iPhone sitting on his desk atop the Stephen King paperback he'd been reading and scooped it up. With a practiced one-handed gesture, he swiped his thumb across the screen to enter his four-digit PIN to unlock the phone.

The problem was, he couldn't seem to get the lock screen to swipe.

Tom had unlocked his phone countless times by simply swiping right with his thumb—he could probably do it in his sleep. But for some reason, it wasn't working for him now. He even tried holding the phone in his left hand and swiping with each of his right-hand digits multiple times with no luck. Then he tried the opposite with his left fingers and thumb—still nothing. He couldn't even power the phone off and on again because the power button didn't seem to be working, either. It was as if he had the reverse Midas touch, and everything he touched turned to shit and quit working.

So much for calling Carol...

Exhausted from racing through the house like a madman frantically in search of water in this two-story suburban desert, Tom decided to forgo getting a glass of juice or a can of soda from the fridge—and he plopped down on the living room sofa, instead. The cool leather was a blessing against his feverish cheek. All the work he'd done up on the roof must have taken more out of him than he thought—but his sudden exhaustion made sense, if he was indeed suffering from heat exhaustion.

Tom's last thought before consciousness drifted away from him was that he really should drink something—he shouldn't let himself get too dehydrated.

But he was too cool and comfortable right where he was to even move...

It felt like hours later when Tom finally came to with a start, sitting bolt upright. He peered around to try to get some sense of what time it was, to determine how long he'd been out.

The light outside hadn't changed, from what he could tell, and the house was still pleasantly cool. It was quiet, too, with no one else in sight or within earshot—so maybe he hadn't slept as long as he initially thought, and Carol and the girls were still out shopping.

Tom shook his head to clear it and rose to his feet, plodding toward the kitchen and mentally replaying the chronology of recent events in reverse order.

He could remember trying to call Carol, but he'd been unable to unlock his phone by swiping past the lock screen.

Then, working backward, he remembered trying all the upstairs bathroom faucets and finding that none of them provided him with any water.

Before that, he'd tried the downstairs bathroom faucet—which he noted now as he passed it on his way to the kitchen.

Now that Tom was in the kitchen, he remembered slamming the glass down on the counter when he wasn't able to get water from the kitchen faucet—after the ice-maker had failed to do its designated job, too.

But the glass was not where Tom had left it.

His brow narrowed as he approached the kitchen sink and saw the glass in the dish drainer, which was where he'd gotten it originally.

Tom blinked in disbelief. He vividly recalled slamming the glass down on the counter—because he'd admonished himself for doing so, since he didn't want to have to clean up broken glass.

So how, then, did the glass wind up back in the dish drainer?

Tom raised a hand to his mouth to ponder this when he realized something else.

He was no longer thirsty.

He should be parched, considering how long he'd been working in the unforgiving sun up on the roof—and adding to that however long he'd been crashed out on the sofa.

But his thoughts stubbornly returned to that glass in the dish drainer instead of where he'd left it on the counter.

Maybe Carol and the girls did get back from shopping at some point, and one of them rinsed out his glass and set it in the dish drainer for him. And he'd been in too deep of a sleep to hear them coming home.

But then, where were they now? The house was too quiet.

Without thinking to check a clock to see what time it was, Tom raced back toward the front room to look out the window to see if Carol's car was in the driveway.

Her sensible silver Taurus in need of new front brakes was nowhere to be seen.

Tom did, however, spot his extension ladder lying in grass across his front lawn.

He could have sworn he'd put the ladder back in the backyard shed after he came down from...

Tom's eyes widened.

He could not, for the life of him, recall coming down off of the roof.

He remembered finishing his morning coffee and bagel and saying goodbye to Carol and the girls as they left to go shopping...

He remembered donning his raggedy work gloves and getting the extension ladder from the shed...

He remembered the precarious climb up the aluminum ladder—which he dreaded every time—followed by the waves of almost suffocating heat rising off the shingles once he finally ascended to the second story...

He even remembered the revulsion of scooping out the compost-like sludge from the gutters—and at least one time when he almost lost his balance reaching too far for a branch with the tree-trimmers...

Then...

He had found himself in the kitchen trying to get a drink of water.

Something wasn't right...

With something resembling panic rising in his chest, Tom dashed out the front door and back into the searing summer heat.

Except it didn't feel as hot to him anymore.

He was about to give this further consideration when he spotted an odd-shaped bundle of something in the grass on the side of his house where Carol had him plant rose bushes last year.

Even as Tom approached the mysterious-yet-still-oddly-familiar bundle to inspect it a little more closely, he knew full well exactly what it was—but there was a missing connection that prevented him from fully comprehending what he was seeing.

The first thing his mind was able to process was that the bundle more closely resembled a person lying sprawled face down in the grass, its limbs splayed out at unnatural angles.

Next, Tom recognized the body-shaped bundle was wearing his Carhartt work jeans with the left rear pocket missing—which he could remember snagging and losing with a loud rip when he caught it on one of the downspouts while taking down the Christmas lights back in February.

Then Tom identified his gray sweat-stained Brian Urlacher number 54 Chicago Bears t-shirt.

Lastly, the final piece of the puzzle snapped into place when Tom noticed that the grass outlining the prone figure was stained a dark maroon—almost black—especially by the head.

The dawning yet still incomprehensible realization caused Tom to stagger back a step, his legs suddenly unsteady and quivering.

Then he noticed something else.

Even in the harsh summer sunlight, he cast no shadow.

So, the mystery of how he had gotten down from the roof was now solved, it seemed.

With a most tragic and now undeniable conclusion.

Tom's next thought was that he wished he could do something to spare his wife and daughters the gruesome sight of his lifeless body once they returned home. But he somehow knew any attempt to move the body would be as ineffective as all his other interactions with the living world: the ice-maker, the faucets, his iPhone...

Even the glass he thought he'd taken from the dish drainer to get himself a drink of water.

If there was any consolation to be had, it was that he would never be thirsty ever again.

Resigning himself to his fate and realizing that there was little else to be done, Tom Edwards turned away from the lifeless body that he had once occupied and headed back toward the house, wondering just how long this seemingly endless Saturday morning would last for him.