

*A hilarious take on suburban living.
Misery loves comedy!*

Summer of the Bats

by Stu Bloom

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SUMMER OF THE BATS

STU BLOOM

**What we hope they'll be saying in praise of
*Summer of the Bats***

If laughter is the best medicine, once you read Summer of the Bats you won't even need healthcare.

Barry O.

Summer of the Bats was so funny, I'd email you a copy myself, but, well, you know . . .

H.

The top 100% of Americans will love Summer of the Bats.

Bernie

Summer of the Bats is absolutely the greatest, bestest, funniest, most amazing book ever written. It's going to be a huge success, that I can tell you.

Donnie T.

Summer of the Bats

Stu Bloom



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First Edition

I.

It was just so fucking hot.

Slow-motion hot. Shoulders heavy under the weight of a blazing sun, feet dragging through molten molasses. The heat that didn't weigh you down crawled up your legs, up through the soles of your shoes. The news blared admonitions to keep hydrated. You squinted through the hot, white sunshine, through the waves wiggling above the blacktop. You sucked in hot air, searched for the slightest hint of a breeze. An unwelcome stop on the road to hell.

We were having the inside of the house painted.

The old house in Connecticut. Charming.

I remembered the realtor walking us through the house when we first saw it. I had commented on the lack of central air-conditioning. In accordance with the Realtor's Bible, she dismissed the negative: It's in the woods. You're under the trees, lots of shade—just a couple of warm days in August. You don't even need air-conditioning.

Now we sat in the family room, glued to the leather couch by the heat, the air still and stifling. Laura sat with a

bag of ice on her head, hand cupped over her mouth and nose, futile defense against the paint fumes. Her favorite month of the year is January. She was in a very good mood.

Number one son, Jason, came into the room with a canvas bag slung over his shoulder. He was getting ready to leave, his weekend visit cut short by the painting.

Hey, he asked off-handedly as he said his good-byes and prepared to depart, what's with all those bats that came flying out of the house last night?

Bats? Bats? Are you kidding? What kind of bats? Laura was clearly taken aback.

Bats. Lots of them. They flew right out from under the roof and into the woods. Like millions of them. Didn't you know there were bats? You know, bats are good.

My god. Bats?

It was years ago, long before we knew anything about bats, that we took the big leap. Moved to Connecticut from The City. Manhattan. Where you got fruit from the Korean green grocer on the corner, pizza up the block, Chinese food from the menus shoved under the door. If there was no hot water, you called the Super. If the dryer wasn't working, you

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called the Super. If the toilet was running, you called the Super. As long as you took care of the Super at Christmastime, life was simple. The only brushes with wildlife were the pigeons in the park, the deeply filed away and largely ignored sense that rats ruled the city from somewhere beneath the subway tracks, and a constant vigilance to keep the kitchen scrupulously clean and free of cockroaches. Our own pest-avoidance strategy included a pantry stocked with bundles of wrapped food secured with rubber bands, Russian doll-like layers of plastic bags inside plastic bags inside plastic bags. With the meticulous bug-proofing protocol, it took ten minutes to get a lousy pistachio and another ten to put the package back. I came to rely solely on refrigerated foods.

On that moving day years ago, three very big men—buildings with legs—unloaded and placed our furniture in the new house, and then we watched with a touch of sadness as the moving van pulled away, winding back up the long lane, and disappearing into the woods, retracing its route to the main road and a return to civilization. Laura and I stood in our new driveway as night fell. It was dark. So dark. Really dark. It was black. You couldn't see your hand in front of your face.

Jeez. I peered through the darkness, looking for any slight movement, trying to make out the shadowy image of my wife. Where do you get ice cream in a place like this?

Ice cream? Forget ice cream. Do you think there are bears?

Bears?

Yes, bears. Do you think there are bears? I think I read about bears.

There are no bears.

Oh yeah? How do you know? All of a sudden you're an expert on mammoth man-eating mammals? I think there are bears here. I think this is where bears live.

There are no bears. This is where we live.

Well, there better not be bears. First sign of a bear, I'm outta here.

Let's go inside.

Why? You think there are bears?

We've got to get some lights out here. It's really dark.

Yeah. We want to make sure the bears can find us.

Hey, if anything, lights will keep the bears away.

Keep the bears away? So you *do* think there are bears! I knew it.

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There are no bears. Enough with the bears. Let's get inside.

It was early August when we moved in. Two full acres set in the woods with a big clearing for the house. Lots of grass, well, lots of green. We had made the life passage from Manhattan apartment dwellers to country squires.

That first Saturday morning, I stepped out onto the back deck and took in the property, preening with the satisfaction of ownership. The sky was blue; the trees were green; the woods were beautiful. If I'd worn suspenders, I'd have hooked my thumbs in them. I was a land baron. I folded my arms across my chest, nodded in approval and surveyed the grounds with more than a hint of smugness. Stood there, nodding, surveying, surveying, nodding.

Damn, I thought, we're going to need a lawn mower. A serious lawn mower.

Hey, Jason, I called. Since the day we moved in he'd been holed up in his new room, lamenting the exodus from The City. Hey, Jason, I called again, come on down here.

No response. He was royally pissed off. We'd dragged him away from his friends, his school, his local haunts, his independence, to this hellhole on earth where you needed a car to get anywhere, where no one knew how to talk or

dress, where you couldn't even find a decent slice of pizza. How do you live in a place without a subway? It sucked. It sucked big time. It sucked the soul right out of him.

Hey, Jason, come on, let's take a ride, I called.

No way was he coming down. I went up. Knocked on the door.

Go away.

I went in.

He was curled up in a corner, fetal position, listening to the sound track of *Les Misérables*.

What? More a demand than a question.

Come on, take a ride with me.

Where? What for? He spoke but didn't move.

To get a lawn mower.

For what?

To mow the lawn. We need to mow the lawn. We need a lawn mower to mow the lawn.

In The City, they don't have lawns.

But here we do.

Whose fault is that?

The grass gods. Come on, take a ride with me. It'll be fun.

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That's what you call fun now? Getting a lawn mower?
That's fun?

Come on, don't just lie here listening to this stuff. It's depressing.

I like it.

This is what you call fun? *Les Misérables*? A mournful voice was wailing about bringing someone home. No doubt Jason yearned for someone to bring him home.

It reminds me of New York.

It takes place in Paris.

At least they don't have lawn mowers.

Jason was at that awkward, junior high age when we departed The City for points north. As a young teenager testing limits, nearly everything was a battle. He had a long list of grievances and arguments as to why The City was better than, well, anywhere. On the other hand, our younger, elementary aged son Matt took to our new digs like a fish to water or, in his case, like a kid to dirt. He loved having a big yard, happy to run wild for the sole purpose of falling to the ground giggling. Often times, Laura would be watching him and then mutter, to no one in particular, It's a shame he's going to turn into a teenager someday.

The salesman was wearing a sky-blue shirt with sharply creased short sleeves that dwarfed a meek pair of biceps. His face was polished and extended right up through a freckled head beneath a wispy comb-over of disappearing red hair. The brown name badge over the shirt pocket said Arnold.

Hey there, can I help you? Whattchalookin' for?

A lawn mower.

Well, whattaya need?

A lawn mower?

No, I mean you got different kinds for different jobs. What do you need?

To mow the lawn.

All right. Well, how big is the lawn? You think you need a rider?

Big.

How big?

I don't know. Big. It's a big lawn. It's smaller in the front, but it's bigger in the back.

Big—like a field? Like for a tractor? Where do you live?

I told him.

Oh, two-acre zoning?

Yeah, I brightened. Two-acre zoning. I knew the answer from the whole real estate thing. I felt like I'd just won a round on *Jeopardy*.

So, what's the deal with this baby? I put my macho on and pointed to a machine at the end of a long double row of lawn mowers. What can I do to put you in this baby today? I said grinning.

Huh?

Arnie didn't like my choice. There wasn't anything Arnie didn't know about lawn mowers, and he let me know it. He talked horsepower, drivetrains, RPMs, rotary blades. He talked and talked and pointed and talked. I gave up. I could see his mouth moving, and I could sense a series of syllables, but I had absolutely no comprehension of the stream of lawn-mowerese that was spilling forth.

As my eyelids began to droop, I yanked my head up and said, I'll take the red one.

Arnie's face dropped. In a voice rich with second-guessing, he recited all the features that my choice was missing—autowalk, self-propelled drive; super-duper, extra-hardened, tungsten-tempered steel blades; a remote autostarting ignition-ease watsamafrass; grass whispering; semi-self-lubricating; four-wheel drive; iPhone connection;

refrigerated refreshment compartment; six preset radio stations; voice-activated Bluetooth integration . . .

I liked the red one. It looked like the lawn mower we had when I was a kid.

What the heck, I thought, I'm not even going to be the one mowing the lawn—Jason is.

Later that afternoon, after a long, loud and intellectually stimulating debate that featured razor-sharp sarcasm, foot stomping and outright threats, Jason cheerfully agreed to perform his fair share of the chores. He would mow the lawn.

Anyway, as he delicately put it, at least it's something to do in this shit hole of a town.

I knew he'd come around.

Jason, recent Manhattan prep schooler, dweller of high rises, and adroit navigator of busses and subways, emerged from the solitude of his room. On this excessively warm August Sunday morning, he was ready to mow the lawn.

He was wearing khaki pants, a blue oxford, long-sleeve, button-down shirt, and cordovan loafers.

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It was a pretty June day, those years ago, when we agreed to buy the house. It seemed perfect. A nice, reasonably sized house for our family, nestled down a quiet, winding, rolling private lane among a few similar houses that dotted the woods in the cute, closely knit Connecticut town of Littleton.

The most important thing about house hunting is understanding real estate speak. Familiarity with real estate vocabulary can save you lots of time and money. A quick primer:

Cozy means small.

Cute means small.

Perfect for a young family means small.

A great starter home means small.

Charming means small.

Loaded with charm means old.

Full of character means old.

Needs some TLC means really old.

A fixer-upper means Do you own a backhoe?

Of course, no amount of conversational facility with real estate speak can prepare you for when your realtor pulls up to show you a house that sits across from a cemetery and says, Now *this* is a really quiet neighborhood.

Swear to god.

The negotiations didn't amount to much. Our broker went back and forth on the phone with the seller's agent even as we toured other houses. We traded figures edging toward a compromise, but progress was beginning to slow. Finally, our realtor gave us a price and said the seller would include the pool table in the basement and the snowblower in the garage, which, apparently, they weren't going to need in their new home in Malibu.

Look, I said. Here's my final price, and I don't want the pool table, and I don't want the snowblower. That's it.

The offer was accepted.

I was an idiot.

Private lane means the town has no responsibility for road maintenance, no snowplowing. Since our very first December in the house I've wished I'd taken that snowblower—every time Laura and I shovel the driveway, trudge up the lane with heavy buckets of salt to scatter over the roadbed like chicken feed, hands frozen, slipping down the hill, backs aching. We call ourselves the road crew.

Look, I don't want the snowblower, I hear myself saying over and over again.

On the bright side, I still don't play pool.

II.

With a strong inclination toward denial and an unwillingness to simply accept at face value the flying mammalian observations of her obviously lunatic son, Laura was determined to investigate the bat matter herself.

The sun was finally setting on this white-hot sauna of a day. Cesar, the painter, and his helper, Guillermo, were done after a long day's work, ready to pack things up until tomorrow. They were drenched in sweat. Lean and muscular, they cleaned up in the driveway, packed up their gear, and then showered themselves with the garden hose. Despite the stifling heat, I'd never seen two guys work so hard for so long. It took them nearly an hour to clean themselves of the paint and sweat. A little self-conscious, I was glad they agreed to have a beer with me as the sun faded. We struggled through the language barrier to grouse about the heat, tapped our bottles together and enjoyed the refreshment. Good guys.

Laura stood nearby, staring up at the house from a chosen vantage point out on the front lawn, her eyes pinned to the roofline as she occasionally and absently tossed a

tennis ball to the dog. The light grew dim; Cesar and Guillermo departed. The mosquitos descended in force, sending me slapping and swatting back into the house. Laura stood vigilant, scouring the skies for any sign of bats.

Come on in, already, I eventually called to her from an upstairs window. There are no bats.

Just a few more minutes. I keep thinking Jason must have seen something.

Come on, you're getting eaten alive out there. It's getting dark. You won't be able to see anything anyway.

Just a min— Oh my god!

What?

Bats! Bats are flying out of the house! Bats! Oh my god!

She came running into the house, hands clasped around her head, screaming for the dog to follow.

What? I said.

Bats. There are a million bats. They came flying out of the house. Like a cloud. Millions of them. Really. I mean hundreds, thousands. We have to do something! We have to do something!

Really? Bats?

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Yes, really. We're living with bats. It's like it's their house, and we're living with them. All these years. Bats! We've got to get rid of them. We've got to do something.

What are we going to do?

I don't know. Call someone. We've got to get rid of these bats.

I guess we can call an exterminator.

Well, we better call someone!

After a sleepless night, I got in touch with the town wildlife-control guy. Turns out you can't exterminate bats. Technically, you're not supposed to kill bats. Apparently, bats are an important element in the ecosystem. Laura made it clear that she was a more important element in the ecosystem, and she was invoking her Darwinian privilege to oust the bats. She wanted no part of them.

In a feeble attempt to calm things, I tried to explain that bats were quite helpful and that many people put up bat houses on their property to attract them and keep the insect population under control.

Laura patiently explained exactly where I could shove my bat house.

Officer Bonaparte arrived in an army-green pickup truck with the town seal painted on the side. The town seal depicts

an Indian shaking hands with what appears to be a real estate agent. There were a bunch of ominous empty cages in the back of the truck. The baby-faced Bonaparte worked his way out of the vehicle, a bit of a struggle since he was about five feet tall and five feet wide. He wore what I can only describe as a khaki Boy Scout uniform with short pants, complete with wide-brimmed hat and chin strap. He had a handgun holstered at his side, attached to a black leather belt that split him in two at the waist like a string tied around the equator of a balloon.

What's the problem? All business. Officious. The very model of a modern major general—or small-town civil servant.

Hello, Officer. Seems we have bats.

Yeah. Not unusual. They like houses like yours out here.

Well, we don't like them, said Laura. She folded her arms across her chest and shuddered. Please, we need to get rid of them. Do you, um, exterminate them?

Oh, we don't kill them. You can't kill them. Let's have a look.

OK, do you want to come upstairs? I asked, assuming he'd want to take a look at the bat residence in the attic.

No, I'll look around out here.

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Officer Bonaparte wandered around the perimeter of the house, looking up occasionally but more interested in the ground.

Yep. You've got bats, he said. Lookit here.

He pointed down at the driveway just in front of the garage doors. The ground was scattered with tiny black curly wormlike things. Hundreds, thousands of them, all there in front of the garage doors.

What's that? I asked.

Bat droppings.

What?

Bat droppings. You know, bat droppings. Waste. From the bats.

Batshit!

Officer Bonaparte flinched a little.

Looks like you've got a sizeable population living in the attic.

Rent free, I said, trying to lighten things up.

Well, what do you do? When can you get rid of them? What do you do, poison them or something?

Oh no. It's illegal to poison them. We don't kill bats.

What do you mean, it's illegal? What do we do? We can't live here with bats. I could see Laura was way beyond uncomfortable.

You have to perform a proper live exclusion.

A what?

A proper live exclusion.

What would be an improper live exclusion, I wondered.

I don't know what you mean, I said. What do we do? We can't continue living here with these bats. How do we do one of these exclusions? What the hell is a live exclusion?

I can give you the name of the regional wildlife-control warden. He's licensed by the state, and he can help you.

That's it?

That's it for me. Don't worry; they won't hurt you or anything. They pretty much just sleep during the day, then go out to feed at night. They shouldn't bother you.

I don't care! We're not running a bat bed-and-breakfast here, said Laura. We've got to get rid of them. She turned to me, Please, we have got to get rid of them!

Here. Officer Bonaparte handed me a business card. Walsh J. Brickhauser Jr., Regional Wildlife Control Officer. Give him a call.

Thanks.

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Yep. Tipped his hat.

He waddled back to his truck and departed.

Ah, Old Brickhauser. We knew him well.

Well, now what?

Now we call Brickhauser, I guess. I sang, Didi didi didi didi, didi didi didi didi, Batman!

She didn't sing along.

You call him. I'm going to take a shower. I'm going crazy from this heat, and I'm feeling so dirty from these bats.

You can't shower. Cesar is painting up in the bedroom.

Oh god, kill me now.

She clasped her hands to her temples. I've got to get some ice for my head.

Brickhauser was a big strapping guy, an aging woodsman. His receding, graying blond hair was pulled back into a ponytail and matched a bushy drooping Fu Manchu mustache. He wore scruffy, shapeless, frayed khakis, work boots and a worn, faded denim shirt with the sleeves rolled up his thick forearms, revealing a tattoo of a mermaid swinging on an anchor on one arm and a big-eyed owl on the other. He got out of an old red, dusty pickup truck, paused

for a moment to size up the situation, then walked over and extended a big beefy hand. Huge hand.

How ya doin'?

We knew him as the raccoon guy.

A couple of years earlier, the raccoon incident brought our first encounter with Officer Bonaparte and, as it turned out, Brickhauser.

A huge old tulip tree stands at the crest of a hill that overlooks our property. Our house sits right in its path should it fall, and I was always worried it would fall. Though ours is the house that's threatened, technically the tree is on our neighbor's property. The tree's not in great shape. Every time there's a stiff wind or a bit of a breeze or if someone sneezes, some rotted branches fall from above and land on our driveway. That tree scares the hell out of me. With every storm warning I have visions of it crashing down on our house. I've talked to the neighbors about having it taken down, always offering to pay half the cost. They agree, then we have a tree guy come out to take a look and give us an estimate. It's usually a big old guy smelling of cigar smoke,

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who stands in our driveway and stares up into the spreading branches.

Yeah, I can see why you'd want to take her down.

Yeah, well, what would it cost?

Well, we'd have to get a truck back in here, then drop it across the driveway onto the lawn. Can't guarantee you won't have some damage. As a matter of fact, I can pretty much guarantee you will have damage. That there's a big mother.

Yeah, well what would it cost?

Well, it's a pretty big job. Have to send my climbers up there. Take a couple few days. Would you want the wood?

No. I want the whole thing down and out of here. What would it cost?

Those power lines are in the way. Same with that cable wire. Boy, it'd be a bear dropping it down that hill. Gonna be a mess.

Yeah, well, what would it cost?

Let me give it some thought, and I'll get back to you.

When? When can you get back to me with an estimate?

What's today, Tuesday? Thursday, Friday. I'll give you a call. Let me take down your information.

He could have been writing down his daily horoscope, for all it was worth. Never heard from him again.

We had three or four other guys come out. Similar experiences. Every now and again there'd be a big storm. I'd worry about the tree and have someone come out and take a look. Same result. One time a guy pulled up in his truck, got out and looked at the tree, shook his head, got back in his truck and just left.

The tree still stands.

About a third of the way up the trunk there are a couple of big old hollowed-out holes. One afternoon, I was standing at my office window, which looks out at the tree, and I saw a raccoon nestled into the opening of one of the holes, lounging there like Alice's Cheshire cat. I could swear he was smoking a pipe. Then I noticed the other raccoons, moving in and out of the holes; the whole family had made themselves at home in the tulip tree. It freaked me out. Everyone knows that raccoons are mean mothers that carry rabies. I worried about the dog, the kids, Laura. Most of all, I worried about me. The things gave me the creeps. I wanted them off our property and out of our tree.

Laura! Laura!

What?

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We've got raccoons!

What?

We've got raccoons! There's a whole damn family of raccoons living in the tulip tree.

What do you mean living in the tulip tree? Where?

There. Up there, I pointed. Look up there. There's a whole family of them. Sleazy little mothers.

Ewwwww. God, look at them. They're creepy.

Don't they say you shouldn't see raccoons in the daytime? Doesn't that mean they have rabies or something?

I don't know. I don't know anything about raccoons. They don't attract bears, do they?

Who cares about bears. We've got real raccoons.

What should we do? Who can we ask?

Who can we ask? How about the Town Department of Raccoons in Trees?

I don't know. I'll call Ellen Majewski.

The Majewskis were our neighbors down the lane. They were the elders of our little woodsy community and had been living there long before we arrived. They pretty much served as our authorities on everything Littleton.

Laura went to call. The raccoons made themselves at home, puttering and prowling about the tree, two lying in the

hole opening, one stretched out on a branch. I'm not sure, but I think I saw the blue light of a TV inside the tree. Through my binoculars, I could see them looking back at me.

OK. Ellen says to call Officer Bonaparte at the town hall. He's the animal control warden.

That's it. We'll bring in the law. Call the guy.

And that's when we first met Officer Bonaparte—when he came out to look at our raccoons.

They don't look rabid or nothing, said Bonaparte, staring up at the tree.

Well, what should we do?

Not much you can do. It's pretty much their home as much as it is yours.

Oh yeah? I don't see them chipping in for the mortgage.

Well, there's not really much you can do about them.

The man had no sense of humor whatsoever.

Laura was having a hard time with this. Isn't there something you can do? How do we get rid of them? They're really creepy. Aren't they dangerous? Do you trap them or something?

Well, I can't kill them unless they're rabid. It's illegal to kill them if they're healthy.

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Can't we just shoot them?

No, sir. You can't fire a weapon on land this close to a residence.

I didn't really mean to shoot them, I was just saying.

Well, you cannot discharge a firearm in this area. Period.

Bonaparte didn't mess around. Anything else I can do for you?

Anything *else*? I said. He didn't get it.

Well, they're healthy. Shouldn't be a problem. Make sure you secure your garbage. Keep it inside your garage with the garage doors closed. If they can, they'll get in there and make a pretty big mess. Also, stay away from them. They can be a little mean.

That was the first time he gave us Walsh J. Brickhauser Jr.'s card.

Brickhauser sounded almost bored on the phone. Deep, gravelly voice.

Yeah, sure. I can come out there and take a look.

What time can you be here?

Tuesday.

Tuesday?

Yeah, I can get out there Tuesday morning.

Well, if you need anything, my wife can pick it up at the store.

Pardon?

Never mind. Can't you get here before Tuesday? What are we supposed to do until Tuesday?

Whatever you want. The raccoons won't bother you. Did Bonaparte say they were rabid?

No, he said they looked healthy. They watch what they eat and work out three or four times a week.

Huh?

Bonaparte said they were healthy.

No worries, then. Just keep your distance, and keep your trash locked up.

Do you need directions?

No, I know where you are. End of that long lane, right?

Yes.

I got it.

Laura was waiting to hear.

Tuesday. He'll be here Tuesday morning.

Tuesday? What are we supposed to do until Tuesday?

Make a shopping list?

What are you talking about?

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Never mind. He says just to stay away from them and make sure the trash is locked up. There's only one thing that worries me.

Worries you? What's that?

He knows where we are. He knows our house. You think he's been here before?

For what?

That's what worries me.

It was probably a mistake to take the call during a client dinner, but, you know, it was Laura, and she was home alone and you never know. I answered and excused myself.

There's a raccoon in the garage! More a scream than a statement. There's a raccoon in the garage! A raccoon! There's an effing raccoon in the garage!

Who is this?

It's not funny. Don't joke around. There's a raccoon in the garage. Do something.

Do something? What am I going to do? I'm in Atlanta. I'm at dinner.

I don't care where you are. You'd better do something. I want that thing out of the garage.

How did it get in the garage?

It made a left turn after the flowerbed! How did it get in? I forgot to close the garage doors. I went to take out the trash, and the thing was sitting there on top of the trashcan, staring at me.

What did you do?

What did I do? I dropped the trash and came back in the house. I'm not going out there again. You've got to do something! You've got to get rid of it.

Well, I can't do anything from here.

Well, you'd better do something.

OK, put it on the phone.

This is no time for your jokes. I'm not kidding. I want that thing out of here.

OK, OK. Let me think. Call DeNino. Maybe he can help.

Peter DeNino is our neighbor, a construction contractor. He does stuff.

OK. Good idea. I'll call you back.

I returned to the table and apologized.

Sorry, minor emergency at home.

Everything OK?

Yeah. Raccoons.

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Did you say raccoons?

Yeah. We've got some raccoons visiting.

Is that a euphemism for in-laws?

Unfortunately, no.

Real raccoons? Hey, they can be nasty.

Yeah, said the other guy, just like in-laws.

A little later, the phone again.

Hello?

It's gone.

What happened?

Peter came over and got rid of it.

What did he do?

I don't know. I called him and told him about the raccoon, and he drove around and went into the garage. A few minutes later he knocked on the door and said it was gone. He told me he closed the garage doors and that it was gone. I'm still not going out there, though.

All right. Well, I'll be home tomorrow.

What a relief.

I didn't know if she was talking about me coming home, talking about me with sarcasm, or referring to the dispatching of the raccoon. I didn't ask.

Well, I'm not going out there again until the raccoon guy comes on Tuesday. You can go out there this weekend. I'm not going anywhere near that garage or near that tree. I can't believe we have raccoons.

Yeah, Brickhauser said as he shielded his eyes and looked up into the tree. A whole family of 'em. Not rabid, though. They're fine.

Fine? Yeah, they're fine, said Laura. We're not fine. We have raccoons. What do we do about them?

Not much you can do.

Um, I could really use a better answer than that. We've got to get rid of them somehow.

Well, you're allowed to capture and remove them, but you can't kill them. Not if they're healthy.

I think I heard one of them cough.

Huh?

OK, so how do we capture and remove them? Traps?

Summer of the Bats

Well, I'm not sure that'd work out real well. You might get one or two, but we won't get all of them.

Brickhauser hadn't taken his eyes off the tree, watching the raccoons move around inside the hole and along the branches. He stood quietly for a while, looking up at the tree. After a few moments, he looked down and went up to investigate the ground around the tree trunk, then the tree trunk itself, running his hand over it.

Lots of tracks, he said. They're coming down at night, going out looking for food.

He looked around a little more.

Here's what I think, he said. I think these guys are just in their migratory path. This is just a stopping station for them. I'll bet they're out of here in a couple of days.

Yeah, well, their reservation is up, and checkout time is now.

Pardon?

Nothing. So what do we do?

I'd wait.

Wait for what?

Like I said, I think they're just stopping here. I bet they're gone in a couple of days. How long they been here?

I noticed them last week.

Yeah, they'll be gone in another day or two.

That's it?

Yeah. Give me a call at the end of the week if they're not gone—or if you see any of them kind of stumbling around in the daytime.

You think they're drinking?

Huh?

That's it?

That's it. You'll be OK. Keep the trash locked up.

I just had to ask before he left.

Hey, how did you know where we were?

What do you mean?

When we talked on the phone, you said you knew the place. Were you here before?

Yeah. Previous owners, I guess. Stephens, Stevenson, something like that.

Stephenson.

Yeah. One time they had a big dead woodchuck. Kept it under a bucket in the back till I got here. Nothing to do about it really; just hauled it away.

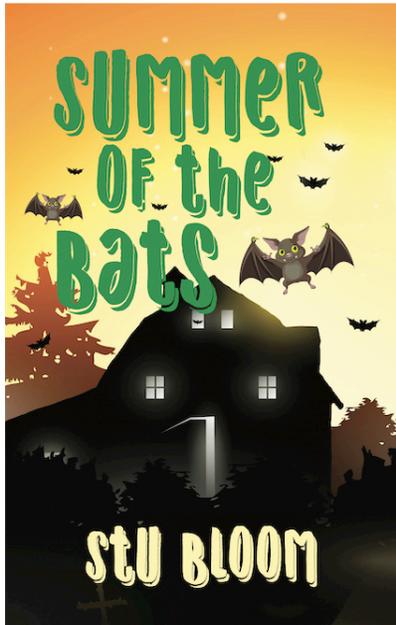
What is it with all this? Raccoons, woodchucks?

Well, it's the woods, you know. They were here first.

Great. We're living in *Wild Kingdom*.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Stu Bloom and his wife, Lynne, enjoy their home near the beach in Fairfield, Connecticut. Among the many things Stu would like to do are play the guitar, speak Mandarin, and hang a picture at the right height on the first try.



*A hilarious take on suburban living.
Misery loves comedy!*

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