

Soda Pop

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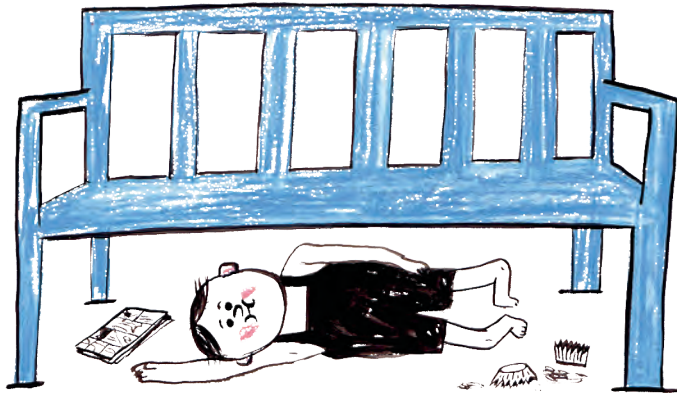
Soda Pop, Mazarin and Dartanyong

At first, all you see is trees. Lots of pines and firs, a few rocks and anthills, and last year's needles and pine cones.

Then you spot a few buildings. One, two, three, eleven, twenty of them. Well, only seven, really, if you count the garage and the woodshed, which of course you do.

If you open the door to the biggest, reddest building, you enter a glassed-in porch. It can take a while, by the way, because the door's always getting stuck. You have to yank the handle three times up and down and side to side, while kicking as hard as you can, then maybe it will open.

The next door will certainly open, because it never shuts properly. Through that, you find yourself in a bilious green hall and wonder where to go next. The best idea is straight ahead.



You'll come to a blue room, with blue walls, blue chairs, and blue curtains fluttering at the windows. But under the sofa, there's a small chubby red boy. He has tiny little kind eyes, big red ears, and droopy cheeks.

His name is Mazarin and he's pretty strong, about as strong as you generally are at that age. Other than that, there's nothing out of the ordinary about him. He eats buns, reads comics, and wanders about in the usual way.

If you turn right you come to the kitchen. In there, everything's red. The cupboards and the stove, the curtains, plates, and dishes. The table is round and red, and on the floor underneath is a rather fat and lazy dad. He might be the only thing in the kitchen that isn't red—he's more orange, like orange fizz. And what's more, his name is Soda Pop. Oh, and Soda Pop is a really great dad—he couldn't care less about anything.



If there's a sudden boom that shakes the whole house like a cannon firing, that'll be Soda Pop switching on the radio. He has to have it turned up as loud as it will go, or it hurts his ears. And it has to be pop music, or it makes his tummy ache.

There are a few other rooms in the house. A fiery red one, a green, a mauve, and a black one. Soda Pop's always fancied a gold room, too, but as long as gold is so expensive, that'll have to wait.

So let's leave Mazarin under the sofa munching buns and Soda Pop under the kitchen table crooning pop songs, and sneak back out through the glassed-in porch to look at the other buildings.

No one lives in the dilapidated old shed to the right. Just a few earwigs and dead bumblebees. But then there's the woodshed, where Soda Pop's dad lives. He's pretty old and dilapidated too. He lives alone in the woodshed so other people's germs can't

jump out and grab him. Not that it seems to help because he's always getting sick, all the same. They call him Dartanyong, which someone said is Spanish for feeble. When he isn't too unwell, he compiles charts to help him remember everything.

Behind the woodshed there's a fancy rubbish heap, where most of the time you'll find a giraffe, snoring with his head in an old tin can. The giraffe came gangling along years ago, plonked itself down on Soda Pop's rubbish heap, and has been there ever since.

But it wanders off from time to time and eats whatever it can find, scares away the cows, and careens around the fields, bellowing. One thing it gobbled up was the garage roof. The whole caboodle, every single roof tile, and a jolly good thing too because there's been so much rain the garage has turned into a swimming pool. Now Mazarin and Soda Pop swim there every day!



Then there's a cowshed and a stable and the remaining cows. Also a barn and a henhouse where a few red and yellow owls live.

That's all the buildings, except of course there's a police station and a very nice jail a few miles away. And there's a hot-doggery selling hotdogs if you have the money for them or something to swap.

And up in the top of a fir tree in the forest lives Dartanyong's grandpa. He's so old he can only make cuckoo noises. At Christmas and on special Sundays, Dartanyong takes him seeds and a few other little treats. And that's really all there is. An old pigsty maybe. A washhouse or two.