

Over the Back Fence  
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Deer fencing  
By Alva Wood

Everyone agrees that deer are beautiful. Except farmers. And gardeners.

Every spring, Isabella Adams feels her heart melt as she watches half a dozen sleek and graceful deer parade across her lawn, the yearlings clinging close to their mother's side.

"Ahhhhh," she sighs.

Then she sees them nipping off her tulips at ground level.

"Arrggghhh!" she screams, racing outside and waving her broom at them. "Leave my flowers alone!"

It's even worse for Sam Burkholder, next door. Every spring, he finds that the deer have nibbled the bark off his latest planting of young cherry trees.

"We used to be able to shoot the blasted beasts," he tells Isabella, one day when she offers him coffee and carrot cake after he's plowed her driveway with his tractor.

"You wouldn't really shoot them," she reprimands him.

"Sure I would," he replies. "They cost me thousands of dollars a year."

"But they're so beautiful," she objects.

"They're so protected these days that they're not afraid of us," Sam blusters on. "In the old days, a good pot of venison stew put a little fear of God into them."

"Is that where venison comes from?" says Isabella. "Eeyww."

"The only legal way to kill a deer any more," says Sam, ignoring the face she's making, "is to hit 'em with your car."

Every year, a few deer leap onto the roads in front of a passing car. Insurance repairs the vehicle, without question. It's considered an unavoidable act of God.

Which gave Sam an idea. The next time he sees a herd of deer treating his expensive young cherry trees as their personal salad bar, he starts up his rusty Toyota pickup truck and chases through the orchard hoping to hit one of them. He figures that no insurance adjuster would think of asking if he was actually on a road when the accident happened.

He didn't figure on Isabella observing him.

The deer scatter wildly through the rows of trees. Sam roars up one row and down the other.

But what bounces out from between the trees in front of him wasn't a brown furry four-legged creature, but Isabella in her pink chenille housecoat and bunny slippers, frantically flapping her broom at him.

Sam barely misses her. But he did have trouble explaining to the insurance adjuster how a 50-year-old Macintosh apple tree had jumped out in front of his car and wrecked his radiator.

Sam eventually got so fed up that he installed an eight-foot chain-link fence all around his acreage. With a line of barbed wire strung over the top along the posts.

"I hate it," Isabella told him. "It feels like I'm driving into a maximum security prison."

"Deer," Sam retorts, "are definitely a criminal class."

Then this winter, Isabella was driving home one night. Heavy snow had fallen three days earlier. The snow plow came along after cars had already packed the snow down. The plow scraped the surface as slick as a skating rink.

As Isabella came around the last bend, her car began to skid. The only thing Isabella could think of doing was to slam on the brakes. The car spun like a top, lurched off the road, and went through Sam's fence backwards.

"I'm so sorry, Sam," Isabella apologizes, after she has paid the tow truck driver the minimum fee of \$47.25 for winching her out.

Sam stares at the ruined remains of his fence.

He wants to snort something like, "If you'd ever taken driving seriously enough to learn what to do in a skid, you wouldn't have wrecked my fence," but he doesn't.

“Well,” he says at last, “I’d been thinking of putting a gate somewhere along here anyway. I guess you picked the spot for me.”