**Beast**

I moved house quite recently.

My previous house had quite a large garden.  It took many hours of hard labour to trim the hedges, weed the borders and, most especially, cut the lawn.  Being perpendicular to a cul-de-sac meant my garden backed on to several others, each with similar hedges and lawns.  I am not a natural gardener and this led to rather overgrown foliage perfect for wildlife, including field mice.

My cat, Agatha, took to bringing home mice with increasing regularity.  On each occasion she would drop them unscathed in whichever room she happened to alight.  The mouse would inevitably run and hide somewhere awkward to be coaxed and cajoled out at some later date.  Invariably Agatha would look for the now errant mouse some hours or even days later.  After some weeks of such behaviour I dared to ask her why (a) as a carnivore and hunter she carried the mouse so carefully and (b) why she left them alone, only to return some time later.  She explained that she wasn’t concerned with the welfare of the mouse per se but that the health of her catch was important to her enjoying time with the animal later.  She was most affronted to hear that I had been moving her mice, although noted she had suspected same for some time.

After time my mild dislike for gardening had turned into a passionate hatred.  My estate agent found me a pleasant house with a much smaller outdoor space.  Once settled in to the house I attended to the exterior space, replacing the grass with AstroTurf and trimming the shrubbery to within an inch of its life.  I decided that plant pots were much easier to cope with and would maintain the aesthetic of the garden with minimal effort.  A small text book on managing the small garden confirmed that this was the right approach.  Agatha didn’t seem to mind the change.  At least she never voiced her objections, instead commenting on the relative safety of the high walled enclosure and how it suited her territorial nature.

I noticed the arrival of the first bee a few weeks after moving in.  To my horror this was not a whole bee, rather the hind quarters.   I am sorry to say that to this day I haven’t discovered the front end.  It was only the presence of the wings that finally confirmed its species.  I gave the bee a simple send off.

This was not the end of matters.  Bees started to arrive with alarming regularity, being carefully dismembered and dropped by the front door.  This meant they had been carried through the house with what must have been some significant effort.  I decided that enough was enough and took it upon myself to confront Agatha.

She confirmed that indeed it was she who was responsible and quickly reminded me that she was a cat and as such had over riding instincts which meant that she was effectively programmed to hunt.  She also commented that whilst she did sleep a great deal she was also alone a lot during the day and was wont to make her own entertainment.  I was about to ask her about her bee carrying ritual but she pre-empted me, saying that she was trying to take the bees upstairs when they ‘fell apart’.  (This grisly image stopped me in my tracks and I never did ask why she was trying to transport them upstairs.)  I tried to impart on her the damage that she was doing and what I understood to be the bees’ place in the eco-system.  Agatha rightly noted that all animals and insects have their own ecological function.  I was sure that there was something significant about the bee but at that moment couldn’t remember what it was.  Agatha promised me she would look in to it.

Some days later Agatha approached me noting that she had discovered the perilous situation bees as a species were in and that was deeply concerned for their long term survival.   I think she had drawn all her information from a single internet source but was heartened that she had at least attempted some research.

Agatha commented that whilst she understood that the presence of the flower pots in the garden was important for pollination the fact that it attracted bees presented her with a great deal of temptation and whilst she had carefully researched the matter, as a cat, she would be prone to lapses.  I thought carefully about this.  I told her that the planters had been somewhat expensive and were quite pleasing to look at; however being cognisant of her dilemma I said that after this crop of flowers I wouldn’t replace them.  After a moment’s considered thought she seemed happy with this compromise and we progressed on this basis.

Agatha enjoyed seeing herself as a naturalist and found some pleasure in acting against her instincts.  It was therefore with a heavy heart that some days later I found, by the front door, a desiccated butterfly.  Hoping for a lone incident I was troubled to find another and yet another over the next few weeks.  At the end of my tether I strode to the garden to challenge her.  Agatha was sat quietly next to the bare earth of a plant pot looking casually at a passing bee.  I suddenly felt huge pride in her resolve, in most matters at least.

I closed the door and left her to her business.