

Moby, The Squirrel

by Marie Coady

I am at war!

It is a war that has taken on the mythic proportions of the battle between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick.

The evil entity in this case is not the majestic, albino whale who was the eventual undoing of Ahab. It is the scraggly, gray squirrel who raids my bird feeder and my world. He is, like Moby Dick, fast becoming the epitome of evil. He is wily, cunning and insidious. He has outwitted me at every turn and taunted me with his fluttering tail.

The bird feeder in question is suction-cupped to my kitchen window, but the ability of those well-positioned suction cups to maintain their grip on that glassy portal most times succumbs to Moby's weight as he lands with a clatter in a death defying leap from the lilac bush just below. The clatter of the plastic feeder against the window is the alarm that sets me on alert.

That clattering sound also sends my fearless Doberman, Katie-Lyn, into a frenzy. Katie-Lyn strikes fear into the hearts of the most dangerous felons, but has yet to convince Moby she's anything more than a big, clumsy klutz.

At first, I thought I had it made. Here was the perfect solution. I'd set my ferocious Doberman on that crafty, little sucker, and Moby would certainly get the message. Especially when he spied a thundering, feral-eyed predator careening at him from around the corner of the house.

But it didn't work out that way.

It's not that Katie-Lyn isn't more than willing to take on Moby; it's just that sleeping on the bed all winter under an electric blanket has softened her resolve and made her less than adept at hunting big game. Besides, she gets so worked up each time she hears the clatter of Moby's furry, little feet on the bird feeder, she quivers with excitement to the point that she knocks over furniture and sends knickknacks and planters crashing to the floor.

By the time I get her to the door, she's breathless with anticipation and making a whining, screeching sound that pierces my ears like a marching band of untuned bagpipes. I try to calm her, but by then she is bounding at the door and can't hear the commands she responded to so well in obedience school.

Unleashed out the door, she wheels around the corner of the house to take Moby by surprise---only to race past him. Moby then stands defiant between tree and bird feeder, the perfect prey for any predator. Except, Katie-Lyn, of

course, who has skidded by him in her valiant attempt to become hero of the day. While Katie-Lyn searches through the stand of pine trees at the far end of the yard, Moby shrugs and heads back to the bird feeder.

That's when Katie-Lyn returns to the house like a conquering hero, a smile on her face and sitting at attention, waiting for her reward of a large-size Milk bone. I always give her one. I haven't the heart to tell her she failed the hunt again.

I've moved the bird feeder to about every part of the window, yet Moby finds a way to get at it. I've even repositioned the cover of the feeder, as recommended by the manufacturer, so that only small birds can get in there. But Moby, the contortionist, manages to slither that furry, little body among the seed so lovingly placed there for the tufted titmouse, nuthatch, chickadee and red-bellied woodpecker.

I did, for a time, find a purely scientific solution. It was one of constant vigilance, which kept me a prisoner in my own home. It consisted of actions which go against everything I was taught about being a lady. My tactic was to respond immediately to the clatter of Moby's furry feet by running to the window, rolling it open and shouting obscenities, while I banged like a crazy woman on the window sill. This worked well at first. But lately, Moby perches on the Lilac bush and looks askance at me as if he is commenting on my unladylike behavior.

Finally, I turned to the Internet for help. After a most cursory search, I found 1,082,567 sites devoted to squirrels. One was entitled, "Squirrels aren't always cute". It told the tale of a Florida coed who was attacked by a crazed squirrel on campus while passersby did nothing to help. When asked why she didn't run away she replied, "I was afraid to turn my back on him." This put a whole new spin on my problem. Were there actually squirrels who were ingenious, vicious predators?

Nah!

Another site was named, "Zen and the art of squirrel watching". It proclaimed that squirrels were adept in the art of Yin and Yang. I figured it was tongue-in-cheek. After all, the squirrels I know would only be interested in Yin and Yang if it were a Chinese restaurant, and they delivered.

I can't say that I searched the million and more Web sites, but I saw enough to learn that squirrels were not animals to be taken lightly. There are CD ROMs solely dedicated to squirrel songs, poetry and essays. There was even a listing for "Academic Squirrels of California", where college campuses were rated, not only on the numbers of squirrels on campus, but on how well they were treated by the administration. Over all, I deduced there was no way to get rid of squirrels humanely. They were a fact of life and not to be denied .

That night I went to bed thinking squirrels. As I drifted off to sleep, I entered a world where squirrels ruled. Suddenly, out of nowhere, Moby appeared. He had grown enormously from all the great food he got at my feeder. He had teeth and jaws like a giant whale. He swept me out of my bed and dragged me into the yard over by the pine trees. I looked toward my house only to see my family looking helplessly out the window as Moby dragged me, arms flailing, up, up, up into the pine trees.

I woke in a cold sweat. I had an epiphany. No longer would I fight the inevitable. From now on, no more shouting and banging, no more setting Katie-Lyn on Moby. Instead, I will fill the bird feeder sheepishly. I surrender.

After all, who am I to fight such evil alone?

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