

## BACKYARD JUNGLE

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August, what a hot and muggy month. It was one of those typical August days when all a person feels like doing is just lying around the house or poolside and doing absolutely nothing. I was lying sprawled out on my white plastic lawn recliner, constantly shifting, trying to find a cool place for my hot, sweaty skin to rest. It was early afternoon, and I was idly watching the birds flutter around, doing some kind of rain dance since it was too hot to chirp. The grasshoppers, however, were not so overwhelmed by the heat as to stop making their usual noise. The heat intensified the orchestral racket that seemed to rise from the jungle of uncut grass.

Then I saw her--smooth, graceful, elegant, and looking for trouble. She had big green eyes that seemed to look through an object rather than at it. The aura that existed around her suggested she was confident, always in control of the situation, and never caught off guard. She had it all, and she knew it. C.B., my feline friend, must have found it boring indoors, and had decided to poke around outside. She was up to her usual routine: sniffing the marigolds, chewing the grass, rubbing up against the side of the house, and rummaging under the bushes. Giving me a haughty glance, she strolled off deeper into the wilderness of my yard. Then, all of a sudden, she became very quiet, so quiet and still that it seemed to intensify the sound of the cars driving by on the road.

My cat crouched down, staying very still, eyes alert, probing, and ears pricked forward catching every vibration. She was in her element now, and as the lioness, she became instinctive. Staying low to the ground, C.B. slithered forward between the blades of grass, being as quiet as a feather floating down a brook. Slowly she crept forward; everything was now in slow motion, her eyes constantly taking in the sights and actions of the area, her ears hearing the rustling of the grass as it blew in the gentle breeze, her nose out in front of her like a probe, checking the currents, making sure she was downwind. She had only ten feet to go, but to her, every inch of it had to be carefully planned out, thought out thoroughly, so that nothing could go wrong.

She was now within range; she froze, crouching so low to the ground that only the white tips of her ears could be seen. Her muscles became taut, then relaxed, and then tensed again. Everything was motionless. It was as if someone had taken this exact moment, frozen it, and separated it from the rest of time, wanting to save it for posterity's sake. BAM! She pounced, springing into the air and landing on silken paws inches behind her prey--instincts making her a blur of intense grace. The chase was on. The frightened little gray field mouse was startled and in reaction took off running. He would scamper for about five feet, get knocked down, get up and attempt another escape for his life.

This deadly game of tag lasted for less than a minute, but to the mouse, who already had ideas of the "big Swiss cheese in the sky," it seemed to last a lifetime. After gaining complete control of the mouse, C.B. leisurely took her time chomping on the mouse's head. When she seemed satisfied that the puncture wounds that the mouse had received to its head were enough to warrant death, she picked it up in her maw and started strutting towards me. With my skin still stuck to the recliner's plastic, I had been watching my cat's antics with casual interest, but now I found myself staring down at this grotesque, mangled rodent which she had brought before my feet. She was proud of it. It was her trophy, and my glorious part of this whole collage of events was to be the recipient of the grand prize from Her Majesty, Queen of the Jungle.