

Owner's Choice

Audacity was the word Tom would have used had it been in his vocabulary. For the crows to have moved into his tree was understandable, even bearable considering their misfortune when lightening destroyed their former home. But to take possession was quite another thing.

For as long as he could remember, and certainly as long as he could climb, the old beech tree at the far side of the farm yard had been his adventure playground. In time it had also become his highway to the sun. He had a path through the branches which led straight out on to the barn roof. There he could stretch out in the sunshine, rolling into the leafy shade when he over-heated, and from where he had an informed view of his whole territory right down to the house door and his very own dinner dish.

Now all that was being denied him by this funereal family of noisy, wing-flapping, beak-rapping crows. They were building nests and soon there would be more of them. To be honest, Tom had not started off on the right paw. He had observed a bundle of twigs and been informed it was a nest.

Nest! he had exclaimed. *That's not a nest! It's just a pile of wood. Your eggs will fall straight through it!*



From then on, Tom's every attempt at climbing *his* tree was thwarted. Before he reached the lower branches crows were cawing and diving at him, inflicting vicious pecks as they zoomed past. He soon learned to tuck his tail in close and cover his eyes, but it was impossible to climb like that.

Tom tried all means to reclaim his tree, even soliciting the aid of Jasper, the house dog to distract the crows by barking at them while he climbed. He tried to reason with their leader - *I was here first! It's not your tree!* Then he became more diplomatic. *I don't mind sharing the tree with you! I won't disturb your nests. You let the robin and the chaffinches into the tree! I'm only passing through.* The only response to his pleas was louder croaking and more practiced attacks.

When reason failed, Tom tried his true feline tactics. The night patrol!. After dark when the crows had settled to their roost, Tom crept quietly through the branches. Not quiet enough though. In seconds a battalion of black winged monsters had hopped into position to block his path.

For two days and nights Tom sulked and wondered how long it would take a cat to gnaw through a tree trunk. But unbeknown to him, help was at hand. The farmer and the lady of the house had noticed the terrible cawing of the terrorist in-comers, and even observed Tom's failed efforts to repossess his favourite tree.

The farmer was worried about the safety of his new lambs, while the lady of the house was cross about the noise of caws and cat wails, not to speak of the mess the crows were making of her doorstep. They concluded they had not noticed how big the beech tree had grown.

So Tom watched as the farmer applied his chain-saw to give the tree a more contemporary look.

He saw the branches fall and twiggy nests trickling between them.

He saw the crows fly up and circle round, already resigned to look for new lodgings.

The branch over the barn roof fell to the ground.

For a moment Tom's heart sank.

His glorious pathway was gone!

But then he saw the roof-light which had been obscured by the branch.

In minutes, ignoring the activities in the yard, he flew past moving feet and tractor wheels, deaf to the roar of chain-saw and had scaled a mountain of hay bales and pushed his way out on to the roof.

Stretching out in the Spring sunshine, with an *I don't care what's happening down here* attitude, Tom licked his paws with that smug satisfaction known specially to his kind.

***Of course,
in the human world,
reason and diplomacy would prevail***