

FIGHT! FIGHT!

by Joan Black

Now I am not, by nature, a violent person – actually I’m more of a pussycat, BUT, I have to confess I thoroughly enjoyed the fight I witnessed this past week. I was half-heartedly piddling around my lanai, swiping at some dust here, vacuuming up a dead fly there, rearranging a couple of chairs to make room for the Christmas tree I shall soon have to drag out and decorate (and not looking forward to that chore at all, at all) when I heard this most awful screeching, squeaking and chattering. The tree right outside my window was swaying and shaking – it is not a sturdy, old big-branch tree – rather it is a delicate, supple, bendy tree. There at my eye level, in the fragile topmost branches, were a couple of very angry critters hurling insults and punches at each other. One was the resident squirrel, I named him Fred, he’s been around for years, and the other was a bedraggled intruder, a rather large blackbird, maybe a raven, a rook, a crow? I’m not an expert on bird, but for sure it was big and black.

There are just a few long brown pods left on the tree. Presumably these pods hold edibles because Fred has been very busy collecting the seeds and hauling them off to his cache under the lilac bush, an animal ritual I’ve monitored many times before. Never do I recall a challenger daring to confront the squirrel for the harvesting rights. These are hard times, all creatures, great and small, are hurting for a place to sleep and food to eat, so it should not have come as a surprise that Blackbird wanted to horn in on the bounty. The first round of the fight consisted of verbal challenges, a lot of name calling, accusations and claw pointing. Time out, each retreated a couple of twigs and scowled at the other.

Blackbird had the vocal advantage – he could caw and screech, Fred just kept up a constant chatter of insults until, like lightening, he made a sudden leap and knocked Bird right off his perch amid a flurry of feathers and thrashing of wings. First point to Fred. Triumphantly Fred sat up straight, saved his bushy tail and did a quick one-two punch with his tiny black paws, aimed at intimidating this enemy. But Bird came flying back into the fray, yellow beak stretched out, feet hopping up and down in an imitation of Ali. Squirrel retreated – point 2 to Bird. Time out again, for Bird to preen his feathers and shake himself and for Fred to scamper up to higher ground and immediately launch himself at least four feet through the air to another branch, knocking Bird sideways in the process. I cheered! “Take that, you dirty bird!” I yelled. Fred made a quick turn-around, counting down to the next launch, but Bird had had enough. That last blow took all the fight out of him. With one last really nasty insult he flew off, trailing a black feather. Squirrel looked across at my lanai, and I gave him a thumbs up and an “Attaboy”. He winked at me and resumed gathering seeds, while I went back to picking up dead flies.