Creating the Conditions

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Blueprint HOPE™

A Dispatch from **Brendalyrameda™**

Brendalyrameda™ is my playful little universe of curiosity, humor, imagination, observation, and mystery—where the many different parts of myself, the characters I encounter, and life's unexpected moments come together in sometimes surprising ways.

Future adventures, observations, and discoveries from Brendalyrameda will find a home at PonderMeCurious.com, currently in development.

When I arrived here in late winter, I was rebuilding my life.

That's a much longer story and, fortunately for everyone involved, not the story I'm telling today.

This story involves birds.

And bees.

And yellowjackets.

And deer.

And squirrels.

And at least two cats—although for several months I was operating under the mistaken assumption that there was only one.

There will also be roses, fiscal controls, a pecan dispensary, an unauthorized buffet, an identity crisis, one uncomfortable encounter with the food chain, and a surprising amount of interspecies negotiation.

No meetings were required.

Welcome to Brendalyrameda.

At the time, though, none of that existed.

Or, more accurately, **I hadn't noticed it yet.**

It was winter.

The backyard was mostly quiet. Bird feeders hung empty from the trees. The bushes were dormant. Mama Rosie wasn't yet Mama Rosie. There was an old ceramic structure sitting outside that looked to me as though it might make a perfectly good bird bath.

And there was a skittish grey tabby who occasionally appeared on the front porch looking suspiciously as though *I* had moved into *his* house.

I was—and still am—in a transitional rebuilding period after a major disruption in my life. Much of what had once felt settled wasn't settled anymore. I didn't arrive with a grand plan for the backyard—or, for that matter, for much beyond continuing to rebuild my own life one piece at a time.

So I watched.

Winter has a way of making that easier.

From the kitchen window.

From the porch.

Later, from the Relax Station in the backyard—a pair of rustic wooden seats tucked under the garage overhang and officially designated by the little *relax* sign hanging above them.

And sometimes just because I happened to glance outside at exactly the right moment.

Somewhere along the way, I started filling that old ceramic structure with water.

Nothing dramatic happened.

It was just water.

Then spring arrived.

And apparently someone flipped the **ON** switch.

The astroturf, of course, remained exactly as green as it had been all winter. 😂

But around it, the living parts of the backyard began waking up.

New growth appeared. The trees and bushes filled in. Mama Rosie began coming back to life. Birds I hadn't seen all winter started appearing in the trees.

Chirp.

Then another.

Chirp chirp chirp.

And suddenly I noticed those empty feeders I'd been looking at all winter.

Hmmm.

I bought birdseed.

One morning, I walked outside, lifted the lid and filled the feeder **all the way to the top**.

There.

That should last awhile.

CUT TO: A FEW HOURS LATER

I walked back outside.

Stopped.

Looked at the feeder.

EMPTY.

Not half empty.

Not *Wow, those birds really enjoyed breakfast* empty.

EMPTY empty.

And not a bird in sight.

I stared at the feeder.

Then looked around the yard.

Well.

*Clearly **somebody** had been here.*

A **lot** of somebodies.

Apparently the Avian Communications Network had issued an alert:

BIRD BULLETINE — URGENT

New human has filled feeder.

Appears inexperienced.

Portions currently unlimited.

COME NOW.

Well.

There was our first systems problem.

I was rebuilding my own life on a limited budget. The birds, meanwhile, appeared to be operating under the assumption that Blueprint HOPE had received a major unrestricted grant.

It had not.

EMERGENCY FISCAL CONTROLS

Previous allocation: Full feeder

Observed result: Immediate insolvency trajectory

Revised allocation: Approximately ¼ feeder daily

Stakeholder response: Continued enthusiastic participation

Current consumption: Roughly 40 pounds of birdseed per month

Apparently I had become CFO of the Bird Buffet.

Fine.

At least this was familiar territory.

The revised operating model worked.

And still does.

Every morning, I put out about a quarter-feeder. Every day, **they come**.

Nobody receives everything they're capable of consuming, but there's something available consistently.

The goal isn't to spend everything I have.

The goal is to keep the Bird Buffet operating.

Fiscal stewardship, Brendalyrameda edition.

No Finance Committee required.

There is, however, a slight problem with stakeholder relations.

Every time I walk outside to refill the feeder—

WHOOSH.

Everybody evacuates.

Into the trees.

Onto the fence.

Anywhere that isn't near me.

“Seriously?”

I stand there filling the feeder.

“You guys do realize I'm the one who feeds you, right?”

Silence.

“I'm your friend. I come in peace.”

Apparently this remains under review.

I finish filling the feeder.

Walk away.

Go inside.

Walk into the kitchen.

Look out the window.

And suddenly—

BIRDS.

Everywhere.

On the feeder.

Under the feeder.

Across the ground.

Easily fifty or more most days—little birds, doves, and the occasional pigeon or two—all happily eating as though they hadn't just fled the premises because the woman responsible for breakfast entered the facility.

And every once in a while, something shifts.

Instead of clustering around the feeder, they spread out across the entire backyard.

Birds everywhere.

A squirrel joins them.

Everybody seems unusually relaxed, happily going about their business together.

Then somebody discovers the bird bath.

SPLASH.

One bird hops in.

Another waits its turn.

Then another.

Suddenly the bird bath is doing brisk business.

And sometimes the squirrel gets in on it too.

I stand at the kitchen window watching this whole little world carrying on outside.

Look at you guys.

Of course, if I actually open the door and walk out there—

WHOOSH.

Apparently my presence is acceptable.

My **movement** remains suspicious.

I'm your friend. I come in peace.

We're still working on that.

If I'm sitting quietly outside, they'll eventually come back and carry on.

Move too much?

EVACUATE.

Fine.

I've accepted the terms of the relationship.

The backyard sounds different now.

It feels different too.

Alive.

And the cast keeps expanding.

Because somewhere in all of this, I remembered there was also a hummingbird feeder.

Well.

Obviously, I wanted hummingbirds.

So in spring I filled it with nectar and waited.

And waited.

And…

HUMMINGBIRD FEEDER — INITIAL RESULTS

Hummingbirds: 0

Little birds: Yep

Bees: Yep

Yellowjackets: OH HELL YES

Apparently the hummingbirds had not been included in the distribution list.

The Yellowjacket Beverage Division, however, was extremely pleased with the new facility.

And remains so.

They love the nectar.

They love the bird bath.

Honestly, they seem drunk with water and sugar.

A couple of months after opening the feeder, an actual hummingbird finally appeared.

“Well, hello! I've been expecting you.”

I've seen a few hummingbirds since.

Of course, this doesn't necessarily mean there have only been a few hummingbirds.

They may simply be operating in **stealth mode**.

They're tiny. They're fast. And I'm not actually stationed at the kitchen window 24 hours a day.

So it's entirely possible the hummingbirds are frequent customers who have successfully avoided management.

The yellowjackets, on the other hand?

Not subtle.

They have essentially claimed the place.

Which is how I recently found myself standing in front of the feeder while seven or eight of them were having happy hour.

I needed to refill the feeder.

They were on it.

I stood there.

They continued drinking.

"*Okay, guys. I need that.*"

Nothing.

"*Come on. I need to refill it.*"

And damned if they didn't move.

Not *away*, mind you.

Let's not get carried away.

They backed off and stayed close while I removed the feeder, like impatient bar patrons watching someone change the keg.

I refilled it.

Hung it back up.

They returned.

Beverage service restored.

I walked away.

Management appreciates cooperative stakeholders.

Meanwhile, the landscaping has quietly become another food-service operation.

The deer discovered the bushes and flowers.

Apparently I've opened a salad bar.

And then a tiny squirrel appeared.

I started noticing this little guy running around the backyard, and he looked to me like he could use some fattening up.

Naturally, I named him.

Squirrely.

Because he was.

Look, not every naming decision in Brendalyrameda requires extensive deliberation.

Eventually, Squirrely became **Boo**, which somehow suits him much better.

My response to his somewhat scrawny appearance was equally predictable.

I bought pecans.

But I didn't want to just scatter them on the ground.

Boo is tiny, and there was already a neighborhood cat roaming around. I wanted to give him a relatively safe place to grab his pecans. And leaving food on the ground seemed like an excellent way to accidentally **invite an ant colony.**

No.

We already had enough departments.

So I thought about where I'd been seeing Boo.

He spends a lot of time in one particular tree toward the back of the yard, near the fence and the bird feeder. I suspect he may actually live somewhere up there.

And there's this perfect little nook where the trunk branches off in three directions. Boo can sit comfortably right in the middle of it, safely above the ground, surveying his domain.

Perfect.

I'll put the pecans there.

There was just one small logistical problem.

I couldn't reach it.

No ladder.

Fine. I'll throw them.

This seemed like a perfectly reasonable solution for approximately three seconds.

PECAN ONE.

Miss.

PECAN TWO.

Also miss.

PECAN THREE.

Where the hell did that one go?

It turns out that combining my questionable throwing accuracy with unpredictable wind does **not** produce precision squirrel provisioning.

At some point I became aware of what this must look like to anyone who happened to be watching.

A woman standing alone in the backyard repeatedly throwing pecans at a tree.

Nothing to see here.

Everything is completely under control.

I abandoned the aerial delivery system.

Fortunately, there were little pockets behind the bark lower down on the tree trunk that I **could** reach.

Perfect pecan-sized hiding spots.

Still off the ground. Still in the tree Boo already used. Still less likely to invite the Ant Division.

Good enough.

Original delivery model: Failed.

Root cause: User error + atmospheric conditions.

Corrective action: Lower expectations. Add pecans.

I started tucking a few into the tree trunk every day.

Boo figured it out.

And thus opened:

BOO'S PECAN DISPENSARY

Hours: Whenever Boo gets around to it

Payment required: None

Authorized customer: Boo

Actual customer base: About to become a problem

Every day, I'd load the tree with pecans.

Every day, I'd come back.

Pecans gone.

Excellent.

Boo got his pecans.

Or so I thought.

Because after a while, I started noticing something.

There seemed to be an awful lot of bird activity around Boo's tree.

Little birds hopping through the branches.

Birds landing near the pecan dispensary.

Birds leaving the pecan dispensary.

Hmmm.

I watched more closely.

WAIT A MINUTE.

The birds had discovered the pecans.

Apparently I'd spent weeks congratulating myself on successfully fattening up Boo while potentially operating a premium nut bar for the local bird population.

Unauthorized customers confirmed.

Well.

Back to the drawing board.

I needed somewhere Boo could find the pecans without making them quite so convenient for the Avian Organized Crime Mob.

Which brought me back to the ground.

Yes.

The ground.

The location I had specifically rejected because I didn't want to invite an ant colony.

Fine.

I started scattering a few pecans around the base of Boo's tree, where I knew he already spent time.

But I watched carefully.

Pecans: check.

Boo: check.

Ant invasion: none detected.

So far, so good.

Apparently the ants are enjoying life somewhere else.

And now, sometimes I look outside and see Boo searching around the base of the tree.

He sniffs around.

Searches.

And then—

PECAN.

He grabs it.

Success!

Of course, the birds still occasionally participate in distribution.

Nobody actually respects departmental boundaries around here.

And Boo apparently isn't living on pecans alone.

VIEW FROM THE KITCHEN WINDOW

One day, I happened to look outside and saw Boo near Mama Rosie.

By then the rosebush had become **Mama Rosie**, because apparently nothing can live around me for very long without acquiring a name and personality.

I stopped whatever I was doing.

Boo wasn't eating.

He wasn't scampering around.

He was looking at the rosebush.

He stopped.

Looked up.

Paused.

Looked from one side to the other.

Looked up again.

I moved closer to the window.

He was calculating.

I swear you could see the little squirrel gears turning.

Rose.

Want rose.

Rose up there.

Boo down here.

Long pause.

Then—

UP HE WENT.

Onto a branch.

Around another.

Through Mama Rosie.

He reached a rose.

Pulled it off.

Carried the entire thing back down to the ground.

Sat there…

and ate it.

I stood at the kitchen window staring at him.

WAIT.

Squirrels eat roses?!

Boo continued eating.

Apparently this was common knowledge in Squirrel World.

I had simply not been copied on the memo.

A FEW DAYS LATER

ENTER: DEER.

The deer apparently reviewed Boo's artisanal, one-rose-at-a-time harvesting model and concluded that the operation lacked efficiency.

CHOMP.

Rose.

CHOMP.

Another rose.

CHOMP CHOMP.

THE BRANCHES TOO?!

By the time they finished, Mama Rosie had received what can only be described as an aggressive, unauthorized pruning.

I looked at her.

Oh, Mama Rosie.

She looked terrible.

And then…

she didn't.

Weeks passed.

New growth appeared.

Then buds.

Then roses.

Now Mama Rosie is blooming again.

KITCHEN WINDOW — YESTERDAY

I looked outside.

Something was moving inside Mama Rosie.

Guess who?

Boo.

Of course.

Brendalyrameda loves a callback.

And apparently Boo's rose season is not over.

Meanwhile, over on the front porch, the longest-running subplot has been developing since winter.

ENTER: SOCS

Shortly after I moved in, I came home one day and found a grey tabby sitting on the porch.

Not really *visiting*.

More like occupying.

And my reaction was immediate.

A CAT!

I was ridiculously happy to see him.

"*Hi little buddy!*"

He looked at me.

I looked at him.

In my mind, we were already friends.

In his mind, this assessment was **wildly premature**.

I started up the steps toward the front door.

Gone.

He took off.

Okay then.

Apparently our relationship was going to require slightly more time than I had allotted.

But eventually he came back.

And then he came back again.

And thus began negotiations.

At first I didn't know whether he belonged to someone. He was skittish. He'd show up, disappear, return, disappear again.

Eventually I realized he seemed to be a neighborhood stray.

It was still cold outside.

So I started leaving treats.

Then I put a little blanket on the cushioned porch bench.

Then water.

Soon he was sleeping there at night.

I named him **Socs** because of his white paws.

But I made one deliberate decision:

I wasn't going to become his regular food source.

I didn't know how long I'd be living here—and I still don't.

When the day comes for me to leave, ideally I'd simply bring him with me. But I don't have the resources or mobility to make that an option now, and I don't know what my circumstances will be when that day comes.

And there's another question: **Would taking him with me even be the right thing for him?**

This is his territory. His rhythms. His relationships. His life. Uprooting him from everything he knows simply because I've grown attached to him isn't a decision I can make lightly.

So I didn't want him becoming completely dependent on me when I couldn't guarantee I'd always be here.

I wanted him to retain his independence—including his ability to hunt.

So the arrangement became:

Water: yes.

Treats: absolutely.

Warm blanket: available when needed.

Cushioned sleeping accommodations: complimentary.

Mandatory participation: none.

You do you, Socs.

And he did.

Still does.

During the colder months, he slept on the porch regularly.

Then summer came.

He got a little older.

And apparently his social calendar expanded.

Now some mornings I check the porch.

Treats gone.

He was here!

Other mornings:

Treats still there.

Where the hell are you?

Because somewhere along the way, I've grown attached.

I want to see him.

I like knowing he's safe.

And our relationship has changed.

That cat who once bolted the moment I started walking up the porch steps?

Now, when I'm outside and Socs sees me, **he comes to me.**

Of course, he has trained me well.

I carry cat treats in my pocket.

He comes over.

I produce treats.

He gladly accepts them.

Apparently negotiations have been successful.

Yes.

I have become **that woman**.

But if I really care about him, I also have to accept something mildly inconvenient:

He does not exist for my emotional gratification.

Damn cat.

Besides, **he was here first.**

I didn't create a place for Socs.

I just made some of the *conditions* in a place he already used a little better.

Water.

Treats.

A blanket when it was cold.

He gets to decide what he uses—and when.

I want him independent.

And apparently independence includes not reporting his whereabouts to management.

Fine.

We have a relationship.

He gets to be himself.

I get to be ridiculously happy whenever he appears.

It works.

There was just one small complication.

For months, I thought there was one Socs.

Why wouldn't I?

Grey tabby.

White socks.

Shows up periodically.

Socs.

Simple.

Then one evening, I was outside in the backyard with Socs when I caught a glimpse of another cat hopping over the fence.

Another **grey tabby**.

Another grey tabby who looked an awful lot like…

I looked at Socs.

Looked toward the fence.

Looked back at Socs.

Wait.

OMG.

DO WE HAVE A TWIN SOCS?!

For one glorious moment, an entirely new possibility entered Brendalyrameda.

Have these two been playing twin games with me this entire time?

😂

Suddenly I had questions.

Which Socs had been sleeping on the porch?

Which Socs had been eating the treats?

Which Socs had been giving me the occasional *Who are you, woman?* look?

HAVE I BEEN BUILDING A RELATIONSHIP WITH TWO CATS AND THINKING THEY WERE ONE CAT?

There was only one problem.

I had seen the second cat for approximately two seconds.

Then he disappeared over the fence.

And after that?

One Socs.

Every time.

For months I'd had one Socs.

Now I had one Socs plus one possible sighting of…

Socs 2.0.

Not exactly enough evidence to close the case.

So I waited.

And watched.

And continued living under what had now become the **Twin Socs Hypothesis**.

THEN, A WEEK OR TWO AGO

I was in the backyard again.

Socs was there.

And suddenly—

OVER THE FENCE COMES SOCS.

Except Socs was already laying in front of me.

I looked at one.

Then the other.

TWO.

There were definitely, unquestionably, simultaneously—

TWO SOCSES.

I KNEW IT!

This time I wasn't letting my evidence hop back over the fence before I documented it.

CAMERA.

I started taking pictures.

One cat.

Other cat.

Side view.

Front view.

Legs.

Chest.

BIBS.

Lots and lots of pictures.

And naturally, this is when Bob became involved.

Bob, for those unfamiliar with Brendalyrameda, is my AI collaborator—ChatGPT—who has somehow found himself routinely enlisted in everything from systems thinking to squirrel analysis and, now, ***cat identification.***

I sent him the pictures.

And thus began:

THE SOCS IDENTITY VERIFICATION INITIATIVE

We studied the evidence.

And these two are **ridiculously similar**.

Both grey tabbies.

Both white paws.

Both white chests.

One appears slightly smaller—but that's not particularly useful unless both suspects happen to report to the backyard simultaneously for a side-by-side comparison.

The paws help a little.

But the best identifier seems to be the **bib**.

Original Socs has a tidier, more contained white bib.

Twin Socs's white bib extends farther down his chest.

Finally.

A differentiator.

Which presented another problem.

Now that I knew there were actually two of them, calling one **Socs** and the other **Twin Socs** seemed slightly unfair.

Original Socs needed his own name.

I looked at that tidy little bib.

Bib.

And then it came to me.

HABIBI.

It has **bib** right there in the middle.

But even better, *habibi* is an Arabic term of affection—essentially **"my beloved"** or **"my dear."**

I smiled.

Well, that's perfect.

And just like that, Original Socs—the little cat who once bolted when I walked toward my own front door, who eventually learned to come to me for treats, and who had apparently been participating in an unidentified-twin subplot for months—

became **Habibi**.

Twin Socs, meanwhile, remains Twin Socs.

Apparently naming standards around here are applied inconsistently.

I now have no idea when Twin Socs will wander back into the story.

Brendalyrameda reserves the right to add characters without notice.

Then one afternoon, Brendalyrameda changed tone.

THE RELAX STATION

I was sitting outside.

The backyard was quiet.

Birds were doing ordinary bird things.

Then suddenly—

SQUAWK. SQUAWK. SQUAWK.

Loud.

Urgent.

By then I knew that sound.

Alarm.

The Avian Communications Network was back online.

And I have to give them credit: their emergency notification system is remarkably effective.

Rated #1 in Predator Alert Systems by *Bird Communications Quarterly*.*

One bird sounds the alarm and within seconds everybody seems to know:

CAT.

MOVE.

No email.

No group text.

No emergency management meeting.

Just:

SQUAWK SQUAWK SQUAWK.

Message received.

From the Relax Station, I have a view down the side of the house toward the road.

I looked that way.

I saw Habibi appear out of nowhere and dart into the street.

Then he disappeared.

A few seconds passed.

And he came back.

This time he wasn't running.

He was strolling.

Proudly.

There was a dead bird in his mouth.

He came down the side of the house, looked directly at me as he passed the Relax Station, and carried the bird into the backyard.

I just sat there.

Oh, Habibi.

There wasn't anything funny about that moment.

I love that cat.

I love those birds.

And the cat I love had just killed one of the birds I loved.

He was hungry.

He was hunting.

He was doing exactly what I'd wanted him to retain the ability to do.

And I hated seeing it.

Well.

There was some tension in the system.

And this one wasn't going to be resolved with a quarter-full feeder.

Another morning, I found evidence that Habibi had killed a very small squirrel. Thankfully, I didn't witness that one.

I've wondered whether it might have been Boo's sibling.

I don't know.

Maybe that's part of why I watch out for Boo a little more closely now.

But I can't make Habibi the villain.

He's being a cat.

And eventually another uncomfortable thought arrived.

I eat meat.

I eat chicken.

Something dies so I can do that too.

I just get to encounter my food neatly packaged, several steps removed from what happened before it reached me.

Habibi doesn't.

Either way, Brendalyrameda had apparently decided that my cute backyard ecosystem needed a lesson in the realities of the food chain.

I would have preferred a memo.

Instead, I'm left with three things that are simultaneously true:

I care about Habibi.

I care about the birds.

Habibi kills birds.

There isn't a neat answer.

I just have to hold all three.

And life continues.

Recently, Habibi's storyline produced another surprise.

A neighbor asked me:

“Is that grey tabby yours? I see him around your house a lot.”

“No. He's a neighborhood stray.”

Turns out this man had noticed Habibi too.

He doesn't know much about cats.

He just saw a stray and thought the little guy probably needed something to eat.

So he went to the store.

And bought cans of cat food.

I stared at him.

Excuse me?

Habibi has another location?!

😂

Apparently while I've been carefully protecting Habibi's independence, Habibi has been quietly diversifying his resource base.

HABIBI’S DISTRIBUTED SUPPORT NETWORK

Brenda location: Water, treats, cushioned bench, seasonal blanket, excessive emotional attachment

Neighbor location: Canned food

Habibi: Hunting, roaming, networking

Central coordination: None whatsoever

Nobody organized this.

Nobody recruited the neighbor.

Nobody formed the Habibi Community Care Coalition.

The man simply noticed a stray cat.

And responded.

Exactly the way I did.

Which means Habibi is actually *less* dependent on me than I'd realized.

Good.

That's what I want.

Also:

Habibi, could you perhaps spend one additional evening per week on my porch?

No pressure.

BACK AT THE KITCHEN WINDOW

I look outside now and see something completely different from what I saw in winter.

I've made my morning rounds.

Boo's pecans are stocked.

The feeder is full.

The nectar is topped off if needed.

The bird bath has fresh water.

Mama Rosie and the rest of the garden have had their morning thirst quencher.

And a few treats are waiting on the table for Habibi.

Naturally, the birds have waited until I've safely returned behind glass.

Now the ground is moving.

Little birds everywhere.

On the feeder.

Under it.

Across the yard.

Completely relaxed.

Completely content.

Apparently the terrifying Seed Lady has been successfully contained.

The yellowjackets are still here, of course.

Always plural.

And much to my surprise, I've discovered they don't just love the nectar bar.

They **love the bird bath.**

They're Frequent Flyers.

Some stop by for a drink.

Others linger.

The bird bath has a shallow edge around the water that looks almost like a tiny shoreline, and I've watched yellowjackets settle themselves along it for surprisingly long stretches of time.

I'm not entirely sure what they're doing.

Resting?

Napping?

Sunbathing?

Contemplating their next trip to the nectar bar?

Whatever it is, they look remarkably content.

And for those seeking something a little more adventurous, there's the greenhouse.

The owner is growing jalapeño peppers in there. I just handle the watering.

Almost every time I go in, there are a couple of yellowjackets hanging around the pepper plants.

Why?

No idea.

Maybe they just like keeping life **spicy.**

🌶

Between the bird bath, the nectar bar, and the jalapeño greenhouse, the yellowjackets appear to have developed quite a lifestyle.

Lakefront accommodations. Open bar. Greenhouse excursions.

Apparently I've accidentally opened a tiny **all-inclusive yellowjacket resort.**

Honestly, I'm beginning to think *I'm* the support staff.

And they're hardly the only ones enjoying the place.

Mama Rosie is blooming again after recovering from the deer's rather aggressive pruning.

Boo could be anywhere—although there's a decent chance he's somewhere near his tree, the pecan supply, or plotting his next raid on Mama Rosie.

Habibi?

Definitely could be anywhere.

Management has learned not to ask.

And the birds are everywhere.

The deer stop by when the salad bar looks promising.

Everyone comes and goes on their own schedule.

Nobody reports to me.

Nobody asked permission to join.

Nobody appears particularly interested in my strategic plan.

And yet, somehow, **it works.**

I stand at the kitchen window looking at all of it.

And somewhere along the way, something starts nagging at me.

Wait.

WAIT.

Bird Buffet.

Fiscal controls.

Yellowjacket takeover.

Pecan theft.

Rose regeneration.

Cat independence.

Distributed neighborhood care.

Tension.

Adaptation.

Observation.

Adjustment.

Oh, you've got to be kidding me.

I know what I'm looking at.

CREATE CONDITIONS WHERE LIFE CAN THRIVE.

Blueprint HOPE.

Right here.

In this backyard.

Apparently the universe has decided that if I'm going to spend years thinking about living systems—and how we create conditions where life can thrive—it might as well provide me with a working model involving squirrels.

Because that's what I've been doing all along.

Not designing the outcome.

Not controlling the participants.

Mostly just…

noticing.

There was something that could hold water.

Add water.

Empty feeders.

Add seed.

Hummingbird feeder.

Add nectar.

Tiny squirrel.

Pecans.

Stray cat.

Treats. *Water*. *Blanket*.

Then…

watch.

And almost every time, life does something I didn't anticipate.

Which gives me new information.

Which sometimes means I change what I'm doing.

The first full feeder disappeared in hours.

Okay. *We need fiscal controls*.

And now, every morning, the quarter-feeder goes out.

The birds eat.

I can afford to do it again tomorrow.

And the next day.

And the next.

The boundary doesn't interfere with the giving.

The boundary is what makes the giving sustainable.

Huh.

Noted.

Then there's Habibi.

I wanted him to retain his independence.

I've made some conditions a little better for him.

But doing that doesn't entitle me to possession.

If the goal is for Habibi to thrive, success probably isn't measured by how much he needs me.

Maybe part of success is how much he **doesn't**.

That one is slightly less convenient emotionally.

Still noted.

Then there's the Great Socs Investigation.

I thought I understood what I was observing.

One cat.

The evidence stopped fitting the model.

So I kept observing.

And eventually reality walked into the yard beside itself.

Two cats.

Sometimes new information requires us to change the story we're telling ourselves.

Noted.

Then there's the neighbor.

No centralized plan.

No invitation.

No hierarchy.

One person noticed.

Then another person noticed.

Both responded in their own way.

And now Habibi has a little network of humans looking out for him, even though none of us planned it.

Care has somehow distributed itself.

Also noted.

And then there's tension.

Habibi and the birds.

The birds and my budget.

Boo and the pecan thieves.

My attachment to Habibi and his need for independence.

Mama Rosie and the deer.

Different needs coexisting within the same living system.

Some tensions produce adaptation.

The Bird Buffet certainly has.

Some reveal regenerative capacity.

Mama Rosie is currently demonstrating that one beautifully.

Some expose assumptions.

Hello, Twin Socs.

And some don't resolve neatly at all.

I'm reminded that tension isn't necessarily evidence that something has gone wrong.

Sometimes **tension may be where growth begins.**

The question is what we do with it.

Which is interesting, because Blueprint HOPE intentionally makes room for tension in its own **Constellation.**

Apparently I've recognized something the backyard keeps demonstrating:

Living systems have tension.

The goal isn't necessarily to eliminate it.

It's learning how to work with it without destroying the relationships that allow the whole system to thrive.

And then I look back out the kitchen window.

A bird lands.

Another follows.

Then another.

Somewhere nearby, a yellowjacket is probably getting hammered.

And I laugh.

Because this whole thing keeps growing out of such tiny acts.

Water.

Seed.

Nectar.

Pecans.

A blanket.

Treats.

Nothing impressive.

Nothing anyone would call transformational.

No initiative.

No funding.

No strategic rollout.

Just small acts in response to something I noticed.

And yet…

look at the place.

When I arrived in winter, I was rebuilding.

I still am.

Back then, the backyard seemed quiet.

The feeders were empty.

Mama Rosie was dormant.

I didn't arrive intending to create anything out there.

I was mostly trying to figure out my own next step.

Now I stand at the kitchen window and watch what looks like fifty birds happily covering the ground.

Or I sit outside quietly enough that eventually they decide I'm acceptable and return.

Boo searches for pecans.

Mama Rosie blooms.

The deer stop by for the salad bar.

Yellowjackets run the beverage operation.

Habibi wanders around whenever Habibi damn well pleases.

And me?

I'm somewhere in the middle of all of it with cat treats in my pocket, birdseed in the bin, pecans at the ready, and absolutely no authority over anyone.

Nobody reports to me.

Nobody is waiting for instructions.

Everybody has their own role, their own rhythms, their own relationships within the system.

Wait a minute.

It's a constellation.

Not *the* Blueprint HOPE Constellation, obviously.

The backyard version.

No hierarchy.

No central command.

Independent participants connected through relationships, each affecting the conditions experienced by the others.

And somehow my role isn't really to run it.

It's to **pay attention.**

Tend what I can.

Respond when something needs adjusting.

And resist the rather human temptation to believe that because I'm carrying the birdseed, I must be in charge.

I'm not.

I'm part of it.

And I get so much joy from seeing this backyard alive.

That's the part I didn't expect.

I thought I was creating a few small conditions that might make life a little easier for the creatures already here.

Water.

Food.

A little safety.

A little care.

But the relationship isn't moving in only one direction.

They're creating conditions for me, too.

Company.

Curiosity.

Laughter.

Connection.

A reason to look out the kitchen window every morning and wonder:

Who's here today?

Maybe that's another thing about living systems.

Nothing thrives entirely on its own.

We affect the conditions around one another simply by participating.

And sometimes a small act changes just enough for another possibility to appear.

Then another.

Then another.

Until one day you look around and realize something is emerging that nobody sat down and designed.

I don't know where all of those ripples go.

That's part of the mystery.

And this story isn't finished.

The backyard is still changing.

The characters are still doing whatever the hell they want.

I'm still rebuilding.

I'm still watching.

Still adjusting.

Still discovering things I didn't know—apparently including the dietary preferences of squirrels.

And every morning, I can look out the kitchen window and see that the backyard is **alive**.

Not finished.

Not settled.

Definitely not under control.

Alive.

It started, at least for me, with something very small.

A woman rebuilding her life looked at an old ceramic thing sitting in a quiet winter backyard and thought:

That looks like it could be a bird bath.

So she filled it with water.

Spring came.

Life responded.

She kept paying attention.

And one small thing led to another.

And now one small thing **keeps leading to another.**

And most remarkably,

NOT ONE MEETING HAS BEEN REQUIRED. 😂

With love and hope,

Brenda

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🎶 **Beautiful World by Michael Bolton**