

The Bat Lady

The Story of the Bat

By Sarah Hancock

Pass the busy, tarmaced roads that gurgle with engines all day,
The same ones that beep when someone crosses, giving people their right of way,
The roads where cars, vans and lorries spin and turn their wheels,
Where people chatter, talk and natter and brakes let out a squeal.

Pass the busy shops and stores which humans weave around,
Stuffing food into bags and making rustling sounds,
Some take piles of letters to post into the red, cylindrical box,
And people still chatter, talk and natter, in large human flocks.

Pass the noise, the hustle and bustle, at the very end of the street,
There lives a lovely, little lady, who we're sure you'd like to meet,
She lives alone but has no room for pets like dogs or cats,
But somehow has accumulated a large collection of bats.

Slipping on a pair of rose, spongy sandals and stepping into the garden, Belinda takes a breath of the fresh Spring air. The smell of jasmine, honeysuckle and freesias whirl on the breeze.

"Ah, the primrose still hasn't bloomed," notices Belinda as she gazes at her flower collection.
"Perhaps I bought the evening ones by mistake."

Belinda takes great pride in her garden and has worked very hard over the years to make it brim with colour. Living on such a busy street can be a little dull. The tarmac black, the pavement grey, the road markings white. Belinda loves nothing more than colour and for her, the small sized garden at the rear of her property brings such joy. The trowel her paintbrush and the soil her canvas, she has splattered, splashed and stroked shades of blue, pink, yellow and purple to make the perfect piece of art.

Shuffling in her sandals and carrying a cup of freshly poured tea, Belinda heads to her reclining chair, placed in the perfect spot to soak up the last few rays of the Spring sunshine. As she gets comfortable, she closes her eyes for a moment to take in the many noises of her tranquil surroundings. Replaced with guzzling car engines, is the sound of buzzing bees, dancing from flower to flower and instead of the chatter of people, she hears the faint chatter of birds,

serenading each other from the treetops. As Belinda relaxes and slumps back in her chair, eyes still closed, a sudden feeling of being watched creeps over her. Opening her one eye, she peers around. Nothing. The only thing she notices is the sky changing to dusk. She closes them again, taking a deep breath and listening to the leaves rustle in the gentle breeze. Before long, Belinda is awoken by a shiver throughout her body. The garden is covered in darkness and her cup of tea, cold.

“I must have nodded off,” realises Belinda as she peels herself from the garden chair.

Checking the time on her wrist watch and realising her bed is waiting, she shuffles back indoors, kicking off her sandals and sliding the glass garden doors shut. Living in a bungalow, Belinda doesn't have far to go to get into bed. Flicking the light and shuffling up the hallway, she heads to her bedroom and tucks herself under the duvet.

After a few hours, Belinda begins to stir from her slumber.

“I'm sure I just heard a tapping sound,” she mumbles.

Still half asleep, Belinda slowly begins to drift back into her snoozing, when a tapping noise coming from the other room startles her.

“What in heaven's name was that?” she cries, more confused at the sound than frightened. She decides to slide out of bed and investigate further.

Shuffling back down the corridor and heading into the nearby room, she flicks on the light switch. Her reflection in the glass garden doors makes her jump, but she soon giggles at her silliness.

“What am I like,” she chuckles, before taking a good look around.

After much inspection and close listening, Belinda is confident that her home is safe. Whatever was making the knocking noise has now stopped. Belinda takes one last peek through the garden doors, squishing her face up against the glass and squinting through the darkness.

“Nothing there,” she exclaims, before flicking off the lightswitch and heading back up the corridor to bed.

Before her steps take her any further, her attention is drawn back to the garden doors. Once again, a gentle tapping can be heard. Belinda spins around, this time leaving the light switch off and slowly creeps toward the glass. As she reaches the handle of the sliding doors, she spies something very small sitting on the other side.

“What is that?” Belinda questions, a little confused by what she is seeing.

The small creature stares up at her, smiling with its set of tiny teeth and waving its minuscule fingers. Attached to its hands are long, leathery, hairless wings, which flap in an attempt to get Belinda’s attention.

“Am I dreaming or is this creature trying to tell me to open the door?” Belinda ponders.

With that, Belinda slides the glass doors partially open and bends down lower to get a closer look at the strange creature.

“Good evening madam,” cries a small voice, “I’m sorry to disturb you so late, but I have a huge favour to ask.”

Belinda rubs her eyes in disbelief. Not only is the creature waving, but now seems to be talking. If this is a dream, it certainly seems a little too lifelike.

“Were you just tapping on the glass?” Belinda questions.

“I was,” replies the creature, “and sorry for disappearing when the light came on. My eyes are rather sensitive.”

“What are you?” asks Belinda.

“I’m a bat madam,” it replies, “and I was wondering if I could move into your wonderful garden?”

“Excuse me?” cries Belinda, shocked by the bats request.

“Yes, I know it’s very forward of me, but I didn’t want to just move in without asking permission from the home owner first,” explains the bat. “You see, I’ve been looking for somewhere to live for quite some time along this busy street and well, your garden has everything I could ever wish for.”

Although slightly confused, Belinda is impressed by the bat’s polite manners. She takes some time to think about its proposal.

“Well, I can’t see it being a huge issue,” replies Belinda after some thought, “but may I ask, why my garden?”

“Well,” replies the bat, “firstly your selection of flowers is astounding. In particular, the evening primrose really caught my attention. All the colours and smells are sure to attract a wide number of insects and that means a feast of food for us bats.”

“Why thank you,” replies a flattered Belinda.

“I also noticed your little pond to the rear of the garden. That is always a huge appeal to us bats, as we can often get very thirsty.”

“Oh yes, I did plan to get rid of that,” says Belinda.

“Oh please don’t” pleads the bat. “I should also let you know that your garden is the only one in the neighbourhood with such fantastic facilities. For some reason, there aren’t many quiet spots, plants or flowers growing in this area and the bright beams from the street lamps and shop signs are too much for my sensitive eyes.”

“Ah,” replies Belinda, “I do live in a rather busy neighbourhood. That is why I enjoy my garden, you see. It offers me some peace and quiet from the noisy road outside.”

“Yes,” agrees the bat. “It seems very peaceful indeed. So what do you say? Are you interested in a lodger?”

“Well, I’m used to living alone,” explains Belinda, “and I do worry that having another person, sorry, creature here, may disturb the peace. No offence of course.”

“No offence taken,” replies the bat. “If it is any help, I don’t like the bright light and only ever come out at night. Why in the daytime you can enjoy the garden whilst I sleep and in the night time, I can go about my jobs, whilst you slumber. It seems like the perfect relationship to me, wouldn’t you say?”

Belinda takes a moment to digest this offer. Back and forth she ponders in her head, trying to think of all the reasons having a bat in the garden would be a bad idea. She reaches her conclusion.

“Well, I’ve thought about it,” she explains, “and I really can’t see any negatives about having you here. I’m happy for you to move in, but one thing. Where will you sleep?”

“If it's not too much trouble,” suggests the bat, “I would need a small home which I can sleep in during the day. Nothing too fancy. Perhaps a small box made of wood, placed upon one of the garden walls?”

Earlier that week, an old friend of Belinda dropped some timber offcut to her home. Not only a keen gardener, Belinda takes great pleasure in DIY projects. She originally planned to use the wood to construct a new bird feeding table for the centrepiece of her garden, but perhaps a home for her new bat friend would be more fitting. Belinda wastes no time in agreeing to the bat moving in.

“I think we have ourselves a deal,” she cries, holding out her hand, which is swiftly taken by the teeny, tiny, bat fingers.

The next morning, Belinda wakes early, carrying a collection of tools. After an hour of hammering, sawing and screwing, the bat box is complete. A compact wooden rectangle, with a small entrance hole, accompanied by a thin cylindrical perch. Scanning the left of the garden wall, she picks the perfect spot in between some climbing ivy. She proudly attaches her creation firmly to the wall, ready for her new winged friend to move in.

When dusk begins to settle on the garden, Belinda perches on her chair waiting for the bat's arrival. Sure enough, as the sunlight slowly dissolves and the moon beams appear, the sound of small flapping wings can be heard.

"Hello," calls a voice from above.

As Belinda peers up, she sees the friendly bat.

"Hello," she calls back, before pointing to the bat box placed upon the wall. "Your house is ready,"

The bat darts and dives around the evening sky, before finally settling on the perch of the wooden box. It disappears through the small hole for a few moments, before peeping its leaf shaped nose toward Belinda.

"It's perfect," exclaims the bat. "Thank you!"

A pleased Belinda smiles. She has always welcomed creatures to her garden, but this is the first time a bat has taken residence.

"Goodnight," she whispers, whilst giving a little wave. "Or should I say good morning"

She chuckles to herself, before heading indoors, sliding the glass doors behind her and tottering off to bed.

Before long, Belinda is awoken by a tapping sound, coming from the back room. The sound is familiar. Thinking it is her new bat lodger, she quickly hurries up the hallway and into the other room. Flicking on the light switch, she is greeted by her reflection once more.

“Oh, crumbs,” she says, “I forgot about the light.”

She flicks the light switch back off, engulfing the room into darkness. As she heads toward the glass doors, she notices something tapping. Thinking it is her new bat friend, she slides them open to reveal a rather unexpected site. There, sat on the ground, smiling with sets of tiny teeth and waving minuscule fingers, were four little bats.

“Can I help you?” Belinda asks, whilst peering around the garden. As she waits for a response, she notices her bat friend perched on its new wooden home.

“We’re sorry to disturb you,” mutters one of the creatures “but we’ve heard from a friend that you have a bat-friendly garden and we’re desperate for somewhere to live.”

Belinda flashes her gaze over at the original bat, who smiles and shrugs.

“Sorry,” it cries from a distance, “it was pretty lonely here on my own.”

Belinda sighs. “How many of you are wanting to live here?” she asks.

“There are four of us altogether madam, but we don’t mind sharing,” one replies.

Belinda nods her head in agreement, tells the bats she will sort a home for each of them in the morning and then resides back in her bedroom.

When the sun rays begin to shine through the window the next day, Belinda leaps out of bed and heads straight to the garden. There she spends most of her day, building, shaping, sawing, screwing and gluing four more perfect bat homes. When dusk arrives, she sits and waits on the garden chair, to see a colony of happy bats darting, diving and snuggling into their new home.

For the next week or so, Belinda is kept very busy. Each night when snoozing in her bed, she is awoken by the same tapping sound, getting louder and more abundant as the evenings roll by. More and more bats appear behind the glass door, all wanting to call the garden their home.

“The smells of the flowers are beautiful and sweet,” clicks one bat to another.

“The insects here are delicious and tasty,” squeaks a group of joyful bats.

“The pond water is cool and quenching,” chirps an elder.

Each morning, Belinda follows the same routine. Building, shaping, sawing, glueing and screwing perfect bat homes to the garden walls. Exhausted by the growing demand and a week of interrupted sleep, Belinda wipes the sweat from her brow and takes a seat on the reclining chair. Looking around, she sees the garden walls filled to the brim with bat boxes of different shapes and sizes. Some rectangular, others more square, some painted, others left plain. Every nook and cranny between the emerald ivy has been filled.

As Belinda glances around, she notices the garden looks more beautiful than ever. The flowers have bloomed to perfection and the leaves have no nibbles or munch marks. It seems the bats have held up their end of the deal, by working hard in the night and snoozing in the day. Belinda is pleased, but cannot shake the feeling of worry. There are no more gaps on the wall to squeeze any more bat homes. Convinced that once again this evening she will be awoken by the sound of tip tapping on the glass, she closes her eyes to think.

The sound of little bat snores gently vibrate the brick walls. The buzzing of the bees hums from the centres of sweet, colourful flowers. The birds in the treetops chirp and sing.

Suddenly, Belinda has an idea. She grabs her handbag and races out the front door, heading down the bustling street. Passing the shops and postboxes as she goes, the cars wheezing and gurgling on the road, she eventually reaches the other end of the street. One by one, she knocks on the door of every human home.

“Hello,” she repeats. “My name is Belinda and I wondered if you could house a bat?”

Belinda takes the time to explain her story to all those who will listen. Carefully she lists why the bats like her garden so much and how helpful they have been, before revealing she has no more room to squeeze boxes on her walls. To her amazement, the residents of the street seem sympathetic and concerned, many shocked to hear that bats still live around these busy parts.

“How shocking,” cries Mr Jones at number three.

“They sound quite helpful to have around.” ponders Mrs Fletcher at number twenty nine.

“Well, what can we do to help?” asks the Hammett family at number seventy six.

Belinda explains that a simple mixture of sweet smelling flowers, a water source and a wall for a bat box is the perfect recipe to help.

“And where will we find these bat boxes?” the residents cry.

“Leave that to me,” she confidently replies.

Before long, the once dull, grey, drab surroundings that neighbour Belinda’s home, begin to spring to life, as plant pots appear filled with the sweet smells of jasmine and lavender. Shallow pots, ponds and trays ripple with refreshingly cool water and the low hum of insects bouncing from garden to garden begin to drown out the noisy road.

The sound of wheels jittering across the pavement slabs can be heard, as we see Belinda wheeling a cart, filled to the brim of boxes. Different colours, shapes and sizes wobble with the trolley momentum. Belinda rolls the load to number three, knocking on the door which soon creaks open.

“I’m here to install your bat box,” smiles Belinda as she holds her drill proudly.

As the evening sky begins to glaze across the busy street, the bats all dart and dive in happiness, filling the air with their clicks and squeaks.