



A Patch of Sun

Dave is sitting at the computer desk in the tatami room. He has finished breakfast and is now nursing a mug of hot coffee while doing the morning email. The sun is streaming in through the window to his right. Being late November, the window is tightly closed, but the warmth of the sunshine is already helping to dispel some of the night-time chill in the room. Dave thinks there might be a visitor along soon, and he is right. Boots the Cat comes in through the doorway, and heads straight for the patch of sun, not even turning her head to say 'good morning' first.

Dave: Well well ... aren't you even going to say 'hello' ...?

Boots doesn't reply, but begins her usual face-washing ritual. She also has probably just finished breakfast ...

Dave (a bit firmer): Boots! Good morning!

When she still doesn't reply, Dave sits down on the floor beside her. She acknowledges his presence, stretching out her neck for him to scratch a bit.

Dave: You know, you are getting quieter and quieter all the time. I wonder if perhaps your hearing is OK ...

Boots: Sorry Dave; I didn't mean to be impolite.

But she doesn't say anything else, and after a minute, starts to lie down in the sun. She is clearly a bit stiff, and can't seem to decide which side to lie on, changing from one to the other before finally settling down. She goes to sleep.

This behaviour is not new. Over the past half-year or so, Boots-chan has gained quite a lot of weight, is clearly having trouble seeing in one eye, and can no longer jump up onto the bookshelf that is her entry to the private sleeping space on the pile of offcut washi scraps in the back of the closet.

Dave studies her for a while. He has chatted with his neighbours, the family who are Boots' 'owners', and knows that she is getting proper care and attention as she moves into this next stage of her life. She had an unlucky/lucky start, being abandoned at first, but was soon taken in by these neighbours, who have treated her as one of the family ever since.

The sun pours in. Boots-chan sleeps. Dust motes waft gently in the sunbeams over her peaceful form.

Perhaps ten or fifteen minutes later, Dave happens to glance over to where Boots is sleeping, and notices something moving. He bends down to investigate, and discovers that a tiny spider - an incredibly tiny spider - has begun the process of weaving a web across the space directly over Boots. The web extends from the chair on one side, over to the shoji screen on the other, and is still in the early stages of construction, with just the main load-bearing lines in place. Moving in very close, being careful not to disturb anything, Dave can just make out the tiny form of the creature - just a speck in the bright sunlight - as she begins to move over the lines in a spiral pattern to lay down the main body of the web.

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What to do? Even if Dave dragged Boots out of the way so that the web wouldn't be damaged when she woke up, the window screen will have to be closed later today, and this web can't possibly survive for long. There are no insects flying around this room. This tiny creature is building her web in a hopeless location.

How much energy does a spider's body contain? If she is unable to catch any food with this web, will she have enough silk left to make another one? Or is this a 'one shot' gamble for her? It seems impossible that such a tiny body could contain enough raw material to do this more than once.

David thinks about these things for a while, and then - heartless though it seems - decides to break the web and move her outside. Surely it is better to do that now, *before* she uses up all her carefully stored energy in a doomed endeavour! At least then she will have a fighting chance to build one in another (hopefully better) location.

He reaches out to scoop up the spider in his hands, but as he does so, Boots wakes up and lifts her head. The sudden motion spooks the spider, which runs across the web to escape. Dave tries to scoop the whole thing up so he can put it outside the window, but the little spider reacts by plunging directly down, trying desperately to escape. Where is she? Boots stands up and walks across the space. Dave gently moves her aside and hunts for the tiny creature, but can find nothing. The web is destroyed. All is lost.

Boots: Dave, what are you doing?

Dave (downcast): Oh, nothing. Nothing really. It was just a spider. Just a little tiny spider.

Boots looks at him a bit strangely, walks stiffly to the door, and leaves. This is her pattern recently, never staying in one position or place for too long. Dave returns to work.

The sun continues to stream into the room ... onto the empty mat.