

Feed The Beast

by Naomi Stevens

The familiar raucous tone of The Beast can just be heard faintly in the distance and I know it will be here soon. Its warning cry sends shivers of fright through me every week as I hear it reminding everyone of their duty. The only way to pacify it is to feed it, but its appetite is enormous. Protection rackets may be illegal, but with two young daughters to consider, I dare not risk what might happen if I miss even one week.

For the umpteenth time I wish Nick and I were more organised. When he left for work this morning, we'd both forgotten what day it was. We try so hard to plan ahead and organise our lives to take The Beast's demands into consideration. Inevitably things get missed but fortunately experience has taught me what it will accept, so as soon as I'm reminded of its impending arrival, I race round the house, trying to find as many of its favourite victuals as I can. Always impatient, it won't wait. My pleadings and apologies will not be accepted. It will want our contributions as soon as it arrives.

The harsh warning gets louder as it nears the house. My girls hear it too. "It'll be here soon Mummy. You'll have to be quick." Trixie, our Labrador Collie

cross, barks frantically downstairs. I hear her running up and down the hall, backwards and forwards between the stairs and the front door, knowing the urgency of the call in the distance. My heart starts pounding. I know we have suitable donations, but what can I use to hold this week's collection of offerings? In my panic I almost trip over a box of black bin liners we've left upstairs whilst decorating the bathroom.

Tearing a bag off the roll, I rush into the children's room. Suitable fodder litters the floor. Frighteningly aware that the huge insatiable beast is getting inexorably closer I cry out, "Help me Sue and Sophie."

They are used to this mad panic each week and I know that not only can their tiny bodies squeeze between furniture to find the most elusive items, but also that watching me has taught them what must be sacrificed to appease the monster. Two pairs of little hands pick up items similar to those which have been accepted in the past. A Jack-in-The-Box falls into the bag by accident but is soon rescued by a three year old who would have been inconsolable at its loss.

Once the girls' room is clear of anything which this monster will want to devour, we rush into the bathroom. In here, fortunately, Nick and I have had the presence of mind to keep our peace offerings in one container, so everything is easily transferred into the bag I'm holding. My bedroom also has a single receptacle but unfortunately we haven't been quite as careful as we should, so again Sue and Sophie help me, climbing under the dressing table and reaching under the bed.

Dragging the now heavy sack behind me, the children and I race down the stairs. I almost trip over Trixie who now decides to join us as we race round the ground floor of our home. Over the weeks we have worked out a routine downstairs. My job is to examine everything at eye level and above whilst the girls check at floor level. We glean more offerings in the dining room, a few additional ones in the living room, then we check the hall. But the kitchen is the real treasure trove, a positive gold-mine of sacrifices. Not only do the work surfaces, the floor and the fridge yield items which can be added to the now bulging bag, but one of our cupboards has recently been adapted with two special containers, exclusively for the collection of donations to this leviathan.

These special tid-bits are stored carefully, separately, ready for The Beast's arrival.

We hear the monster's powerful roar as it turns into our road. It stops outside our home, throbbing in anticipation. We manage to get the bag of offerings and the kitchen containers outside of our front door and down to the end of the path just as the Servants of The Beast reach our drive. The huge creature's mechanical voice can be heard repeating its double caution, "Attention. This vehicle is reversing. Attention. This vehicle is reversing."

You see, we recycle as much as possible, so I don't want the bin men to go without taking absolutely everything we can find.
