



DEL & ESTELLE

THE STORY OF TWO PIGEONS

DOUGLAS EVANS

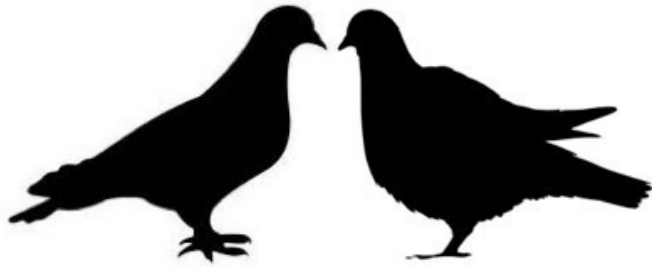


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“Not unless you stop to look do you notice,
And once you notice, you’ll always see.”



Contents

1. The Perfect Day	5
2. A Bagel	12
3. Popcorn Lady	16
4. School's Out	22
5. Secret Sleeping Spots	28
6. Nephew Mel	34
7. Estelle's Streetlight	41
8. The Bridge	45
9. The Pier	51
10. Union Square	55
11. Hatchlings	61

1

A Perfect Day



Del stood on a streetlight at the corner of College and Ashby. He lowered his dark gray head, and fanned his ash gray wings, proud of the two black stripes they bore. Although morning was chilly, the streetlight had just gone out, so the metal top still offered warmth beneath his wide red feet.

“Coo! I hate being an early bird,” Del said. “It’s tooo quiet. Tooo dark and tooo cold. I refuuuse to mooove a feather.”

Below Del, a crowded bus rumbled by. The doors of Café Roma swung open, while morning people—joggers, deliverers, and

early commuters--passed on the sidewalk. What caught Del's attention, however, was the green garbage truck stopped at a red light.

"Woohoo!" he said. "Toooday is Tuuuesday, trash remooval day. And that's tooo good tooo pass up! A fuuull Dumpster is a perfect way tooo begin a day. Tooo bad, Estelle, yooou looose."

Del flapped his striped wings, exposing his white rump to the people below. He rose off the streetlight and fluttered over the café roof.

Meanwhile, upon the streetlight catty-corner from Del's, Estelle, a bluish-gray pigeon, was preening her white-checkered wings with her short, slender bill.

"How good it is to get up early," she told herself. "The intersection is peaceful. The pace is slow and the air is cool and fresh."

A buttery sun slid above the eastern rooftops turning the four corners from gray to golden. A morning dove perched on a power line sang "Coo-coo-cooooo!" signaling the start of a new day.

"Coo-a-roo!" Estelle returned. Her shiny neck feathers reflected the sunshine as rainbow-colored specks of light.

Still fussing with her wing feathers, she watched a woman wearing white earplugs jog past the Wells Fargo Bank on her corner.

"My wings could use a workout," Estelle said. "After a few laps around the intersection, I'll fly to Good Earth Bakery for a healthy breakfast of fresh seeds and whole grains. What a perfect way to begin

a day.” A glance toward the opposite corner showed her that Del had left his perched and was fluttering into the alley beside Café Roma. “Foolish coot. I do hope he’s not wasting this beautiful morning.”

Estelle spread her checkered wings and leaped from her roost. She flew five times around the four corners before gliding up College Avenue.

Meanwhile, Del landed on an open Dumpster in the alleyway. His long skinny toes, four on each foot, curled on the container’s lip for a good grip.

“Yahoo! What’s on the menuuu this morning?” he said. “Bluuueberry pie! Fruuuit Looops! Ooodles of nooodles. Coos! And twooo scoops of something gooey. Poor Estelle. I suppose she’s going throoough her uuusual morning health rouuutine.”

Del hopped onto a clunk of sourdough bread. As he pecked at the hard crust, the Dumpster shook. He looked up to see a huge windshield. “Woohoo! The garbage truck is here already,” he said. He flapped from the metal container and landed on a NO PARKING sign. “I must mooove fast to keep ahead of the Tuuuesday trash scoooper!”

At the same moment Estelle stood on the sidewalk in front of Good Earth Bakery. Morning shoppers streamed out the front door with buns and sticky rolls. An occasional sesame seed, wheat kernel, and berry dropped onto the pavement.

Estelle stabbed at a poppy seed. “What a perfect pigeon breakfast,” she said. “Non-fat and nutritious. Coo-a-roo! I hope Del is eating well today. Lay off the junk food I keep telling him. But he never listens. Del puts the pig in pigeon.”

An almond fell onto the sidewalk.

“Why, thank you,” said Estelle, pecking at the nut. “But that’s enough for me. Mustn’t ruin my diet. Now it’s time to fly to Willard Park for more exercise.

No sooner had Estelle left the bakery, than Del landed on a trash bin near the same spot. He peered inside.

“What perfect pigeon food,” he said. “Half a tuuuna sandwich! Barbequued potato chips. A tuuube of tooothpaste. And—Woohoo!—twooo Fig Neeewtons!”

Del pecked at a French fry. When he heard the garbage truck approaching, he flew to the next trash bin along the sidewalk. He dove in and came out with a cheese puff in his beak.

“Huumans waste so much fabuuulous food” he said. “After my belly’s full, I’ll fly to the park for an afternooon snooze.”

While Del was diving into his fifth trash bin, Estelle had finished flying her fifth lap around Willard Park. She landed atop the climbing structure in the park playground to watch the children slide, swing, and chase each other.

“This puts me in the mood for a flight to the bay,” she said. “What an ideal way to spend an afternoon. I suppose Del is loafing

somewhere. Get some exercise I tell him. You're getting a paunch. But does he listen? Coo-a-roo! Not Del."

Soon after Estelle flew from playground, Del came gliding into the park. He perched in an oak tree by the playground.

"Coo! Seeing those kids play pooops me out," he said. "This roost is a suuuper spot to snooze throoough the afternoooooon."

Not until early evening did Estelle return to the intersection of College and Ashby. She was surprised to find Del's streetlight vacant.

"I hope he hasn't done anything foolish," she said. "But why spend time worrying about that loony pigeon? I'll top off this perfect day with a wholesome dinner at the Basic Bird Pet Shop." Then with a last glance toward Del's corner, she flew up Ashby Avenue.

In the meantime Del awoke in the oak tree. While shaking the evening dew from his wings, he thought about dinner.

"Coo! All the trash cans will be empty by now," he said. "And no huumans remain in the park for a handout. Lucky for me, an easy supper is always available behind the pet shop."

Del winged off toward Ashby Avenue. Within minutes he landed in the alley behind the Basic Bird Pet Shop. On the pavement, he found a feast of pet food that had been swept out the back door.

"What a beauuutiful way to end a day," he said, stabbing at a broken dog biscuit with his beak. "Coo! Estelle says I dooo stuuupid things. But Estelle is so uncool. She misses out on things that make life goood."

The back door of the pet shop was open and inviting smells came from within the store. With his head bobbing, Del followed his beak through the doorway. He picked up flakes of fish food as he strutted past a row of lit aquariums.

“Hello, cutey-pie,” called a parrot in a tall cage.

“Woohoo!” Del replied.

He was under a table pecking at some cat food, when a pair of white sneakers past by. Seconds later, the lights in the room went out, and ---Slam!—the back door shut.

“Cooooo!” said Del.

By now Estelle had landed in front of the Basic Bird Pet Shop. A large man wearing white sneakers stood in the front doorway. He tossed sunflowers seeds onto the sidewalk. Estelle joined five song sparrows in the banquet.

The man turned to lock the door. “It’s closing time, my feathery friends,” he said. “Enjoy your supper.” And after flinging a last handful of seeds, he walked up Ashby Avenue.

Estelle went on nibbling sunflower seeds, while Del flapped from wall to wall inside the pet shop. “Coo! I’m trapped in here!” he said. “Coo! Coo! I’m doomed!”

“Hello, cutey-pie,” called the parrot.

Del fluttered to the front window. He landed on a shelf next to a sleeping kitten. Outside the window he spotted Estelle.

“Estelle! Yoo-hoo, Estelle!” he shouted. “It’s me, Del!”

Estelle cocked her head. She saw Del in the window, batting the glass with his wings.

“What have you done, loony bird?” she said. “Locked in for the night, are you? Coo-a-roo! Calm down. The pet shop owner will let you out in the morning.”

While Estelle watched, Del continued to thump on the pane of glass.

“Foolish coot,” Estelle said. “I’ll stay here on the sidewalk tonight to keep you company. Until then, at least you’re getting some exercise.”

2

A Bagel



The traffic light on College Avenue turned red. A blue compact stopped at the crosswalk, and people stepped into the street between the wide white lines. A tall teenager carrying a laptop computer entered Café Roma. A gray-haired woman using a walker went into College Avenue Bookstore on the far corner.

From his streetlight perch, Del watched a large man wearing a blue and gold baseball cap exit the café. He held a bagel in one hand and a paper coffee cup in the other. Shortly after stepping into the

crosswalk, he tripped and spilled coffee on his white shirt. His arms went up and he dropped the bagel.

“Man, oh, man!” the man said. He blotted the coffee stain with a napkin and continued to cross the street. The bagel remained behind.

Del’s orange eyes, two glassy beads, fixed on the bread in the crosswalk. “Coo!” he said. “Time for some daring dooo! When the bluuue car starts tooo mooove, I’ll swooop down, scoop up the bread, and swooop to the far curb. Woohoo! Won’t Estelle be impressed?”

As Del made his plan, Estelle stood on her streetlight watching the cars flow through the intersection on Ashby Avenue. When she spotted the bagel in the crosswalk her gaze ran up to Del on the opposite corner.

“Foolish coot,” she said. “I’ll bet a tail feather Del will try to impress me. He’ll dive for that bagel in front of the traffic. Safety first, Del, I keep telling him. But he never listens.”

Meanwhile, Del stepped to the edge of his streetlight. He checked the black box on the far end of the crosswalk.

“Coooo! The green man had changed to the red hand!” he noted. “Almost time to mooove. My swoosh angle must be perfect. My landing must be smoooth. I’ll swooop like a seagull and scoop like a hawk! Woohoo! Estelle, won’t believe what I’m about to dooo.”

Estelle checked the blue compact. “I can’t believe what that goony bird is about to do,” she said. “Del’s landings and take offs aren’t what they used to be.”

Del shifted from one foot to the other. Without looking toward Estelle’s streetlight, he knew that she was watching him. “Here I go,” he said. “Five, four, three, twooo, one. Yahooo!”

The traffic light turned green, and Del leaped. Raising his wings into a V, he arched downward. At the same moment, the blue compact rolled forward.

“How dooo yooou like my moooves, Estelle?” Del yelled as he dropped.

From her high perch, Estelle spotted the danger before Del did. A motorcycle was weaving through the line of traffic. Engine roaring, it barreled around the blue car. The driver, his head hidden in a black helmet, was bent forward, determined to be first through the green light.

“Coo-a-roo!” Estelle called. “Get moving, Del!”

A glimpse of handlebars and a single wheel were all Del saw before he lowered his tail feathers to apply the brakes. No time to land, and no time to fly upward. His only chance of avoiding a collision was to fly straight into the intersection.

“Hoo! Hoooo!” he cried, making the sharp turn.

Flap! Flap! Flap! Del’s wings were a blur as he tore across Ashby Avenue. The motorcycle was on his tail. A glance told him

that if he veered left, an oncoming delivery truck would crunch him. If he hooked right, he would smack into the rear of a bus. Flap! Flap! Flap! Through the blinding bus exhaust, he kept flying up College Avenue.

Overhead, Estelle witnessed everything. She saw the motorcycle gaining on Del. She saw Del beating his wings in a frenzy.

“I can’t bear to watch this,” she said.

“I just hope Estelle isn’t watching,” said Del.

The roar of the motorcycle rumbled in his ears. He cut curb to curb, but rows of parked cars blocked his access to the sidewalk.

Flap! Flap! Flap! Finally, a fire hydrant allowed an opening. Dipping a wing, Del hooked to the right. A long glide took him over the curb. He landed on the sidewalk as the motorcycle roared past.

“I’m coool! I’m coool!” he said, strutting back and forth as if nothing unusual had happened. “Smoooth, coool Del here. Planned it that way.”

A pair of flip-flops passed his head. A black terrier on a leash snarled at him. But nothing bothered Del more than the sight of the streetlight pole a few yards down College Avenue. He knew who stood on top of that streetlight. He knew who was staring down at him.

“Coo!” he said.

3

The Popcorn Lady



Del stood on his streetlight perch. He looked left and spotted the #52 bus coming up Ashby Avenue.

“Coo! It’s Thursday afternooon,” he said. “And whooo gets off the bus each Thursday afternooon! Woohoo! The Popcorn Lady! That’s whooo.”

Del fanned his striped wings. The #52 bus stopped a block away to let off a boy with a skateboard tucked under his arm.

“The Popcorn Lady will get off at the next stop,” he said. “She’ll sit on the bus stop bench and wait for me. She’ll call me Pretty

Bird and toss me popcorn all afternooon.” He looked across the intersection. “And boooohooo for yooou, Estelle. Since yooou have no viecew of the bus stop from your perch, yooou haven’t a cluuue about the popcorn.”

On the opposite corner, Estelle was perched her streetlight preening her feathers. She saw the #52 bus entered the intersection. She watched it turn right on College Avenue and roll past Café Roma. Leaning far to the left, she saw the bus stopped outside the Elmwood Movie Theater.

“Del thinks I can’t see the bus stop from here,” she said. “Foolish coot. He’ll stuff himself with popcorn all afternoon.”

Meanwhile, Del stared down upon the bus’s long white top. His dark head swayed side to side as the bus door folded open.

“Hellooo, Popcorn Lady,” he said. But only a college student wearing a leather backpack climbed down the steps.

“Coo! Where are yooou Popcorn Lady?” said Del. “What will I dooo for food if yooou don’t come toooday?”

As Del watched the bus, Estelle watched Del. “What would Del do for food without handouts from people?” she asked herself. “Yesterday he pigged out on potato chips in the park. Tomorrow he’ll stand outside the doughnut shop. I bet he’s forgotten how to hunt for fresh seeds and whole grains. Coo-a-roo! I must do something before that Dodo ruins his health on junk food.”

Just then Del heard a muffled shout from inside the bus. The bus door reopened and a woman dressed in a long brown dress and carrying a large white shopping bag, clumped down the stairs.

“Halleluuujah!” Del shouted. “How dooo yooou dooo, Popcorn Lady?”

The woman in brown walked to the bus stop bench and sat down.

“Coo! Now she’s reaching into her bag,” said Del. “Now she’s pulling out a bag of...popcorn! Woohoo! And she wants tooo toss her popcorn tooo Del. I mustn’t keep her waiting.” Flapping his wings, he dipped to the sidewalk.

At the same moment, Estelle searched the rooftops surrounding the intersection. On the roof of Wells Fargo Bank she spotted what she was looking for, a large red squirrel.

“How I loathe squirrels,” she said. “Such chatterboxes. But a pigeon must do what a pigeon must do.”

With a single flap of her wings, Estelle sailed onto the bank’s flat roof. The instant she landed, the squirrel ran up to her and began to talk.

“Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter.”

Estelle listened, while continuing to clean her feathers.

“Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter,” the squirrel went on. “Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter.”

Still Estelle listened. “Excuse me,” she said. “May I have a word?”

But the squirrel ignore her. “Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter.”

At this point Del stood a few yards from the Popcorn Lady’s brown boots.

“Pretty bird,” she called, flinging a handful of popcorn onto the pavement. “Come, come Pretty Bird.”

With his head bobbing front to back, Del stepped closer to the bench. He pecked at a popcorn kernel.

“Oh, deeelicious,” he said. “The popcorn is fresh! And I have the entire sidewalk to myself.”

“Pretty bird,” chanted the woman, tossing more popcorn.

Del stabbed a second kernel, took two steps closer, and picked up another piece. With each step more popcorn rained down around him.

“Oh, deeelectable! Oh, deelightful!” he said. “Estelle you have no idea what you’re missing.”

While Del gorged on popcorn, Estelle remained with the squirrel on the bank roof.

“Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter. Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter.”

“Del, you have know idea what I go through for you,” she said.

“Chatter, chatter, chit, chit, chatter chatter.”

Finally Estelle flapped her wings and rose a foot into the air. “Will you be quiet, squirrel!” she shouted. She cocked her head toward the bus stop. “Look! Popcorn! All you can eat!”

By now Del stood inches away from the Popcorn Lady’s feet. Another white shower of popcorn bounced on the pavement.

“Pretty bird. Pretty bird,” the woman said.

“Oh, this is yummy! This is stuuupendous!” Del said, eating as fast as he could.

As Del bent for another piece, something soft brushed his side. The next thing he knew a large, furry object was pushing at his beak.

“Coo!” Del called out. “A squirrel’s tail? Phoooeey! What’s a squirrel doing here? Shooo! Get out of my face squirrel!”

Without bothering to turn around, the squirrel swished his tail, knocking Del toward the curb.

“Pretty Boy,” said the Popcorn Lady. “Come, Pretty Boy.”

“Pretty Boy” said Del regaining his balance. He saw the red squirrel sitting on its haunches, facing the bus bench. “Hooo! That’s no pretty boy ! That’s a stuuupid squirrel! And he’s eating my popcorn!”

“Pretty Boy,” the woman repeated, tossing more popcorn.

Del darted toward the closest kernel. But another squish of the squirrel’s tail sent him rolling onto his side. He ran for another piece, only to have the squirrel pounced on it first. A dash toward a third

and fourth piece got the same results. Each time the bulky red squirrel beat him to it.

“How cruuuel! How ruuude!” Del said. “My feast is ruuined. Where did this koooky squirrel come from? Coo! How huumiliating! I’m glad Estelle can’t see this.”

Estelle, however, was enjoying the scene from her streetlight.

“Foolish coot,” she said. “I also told the squirrel about the Popcorn Lady for his own good. Who would look after Del if I didn’t? He does put the pig in pigeon.”

4

School's Out



Del loved children. He loved the way they screamed and chased him on the sidewalk, never intending to catch him. He loved the way they waved when he sailed down from his streetlight. And he especially loved how they tossed him sugary crumbs when he visited Sweet Dreams Doughnut Shop.

The next afternoon Del flew across Ashby Avenue. He banked left and landed outside the doughnut shop door. Pointing his beak upward, he checked the time by the sun.

“Coo! Schoool will be out soon!” he said. “Sooon stuuudents will be buying doughnuts.”

Del strutted back and forth before the door. At last, he spied two girls walking toward him.

“Yahooo! Sugary crumbs for me!” he said. He glanced toward the streetlight across College Avenue. “And nothing for yooou, Estelle!”

While Del looked toward Estelle, Estelle looked toward Del’s streetlight. With Del gone, she had a clear view of its top.

“What a mess!” she said. “His perch is stained totally white! And look at the pole and street signs below it. They’re also splattered with Del’s droppings. It will take a long rainy winter to clean up that filth.”

Meanwhile, Del watched the two girls approach Sweet Dreams Doughnut Shop. One girl, perhaps a kindergartner, was small, while the other was tall and a few grades older.

“Yooo-hooo, you twooo!” Del called. “Cooool duuude Del is waiting for yooou!”

When the younger girl spotted Del, she ran after him shouting, “Robin! Robin!”

Del dipped his dark head. “A robin indeed!” he said. “Robins eat worms and can only hop along the ground. But a pigeon can run like this...” He stepped quickly toward the curb. “Woohoo! Can’t catch me! Can’t catch me!”

“Robin! Robin!” called the girl, still chasing Del.

“Woohoo!” Del repeated, running back toward the doughnut shop. “Almost got me! But yooou didn’t. Coos! Can’t catch me.”

The older girl grabbed the younger one by the arm. “That’s not a robin, it’s a dumb pigeon,” she said. “Come on. Mom said we can buy one doughnut each.”

In the meantime, Estelle continued to brood about Del’s messy ways.

“And the crudest thing Del does is to aim at passing cars,” she said. “He splatters windshields with his poop and calls that a Pigeon Whitewash. Disgusting! Pigeons such as Del are the reason people call us flying rats and winged rodents. Doves of peace is the nickname I prefer.”

Estelle looked toward the doughnut shop and spotted something troubling. Tramping around the corner was a hefty boy of about ten who was known to all pigeons in the neighborhood.

“Coo-a-roo! That’s Louis,” she said. “Beware, Del. I hope you’re not foolish enough to play chase with that brute.”

At that moment, Del looked up. A large boy wearing an untucked polo shirt and blue jeans walked around the corner.

“Coo! Looouis!” Del said. “Woohoo! Can’t catch me! Can’t catch me, Looouis!”

The instant the boy spotted the pigeon, he charged toward him. Waiting until the last second, Del fluttered toward the street. He left

three feathers behind. Stomp! went the boy's black sneaker upon the pavement precisely where Del had stood.

"Phewww!" said Del. "Looouis is getting quicker."

"I'll get you bird," said the boy, and he came after Del again

Stomp! Stomp! Stomp! The black sneaker pounded the sidewalk. Each time, in a swirl of feathers, Del flew from beneath the rubber sole.

Finally Del flew toward the corner. "Coo! Looouis is in a foul mood tooday," he said. "He's not fooling around." He landed on the ASHBY AVE sign and looked across the street. "How about that for coool daring dooo, Estelle?"

Estelle looked toward Del. "You booby," she thought. "So uncool! Look at the feathers you just lost. When was the last time you washed. Coo-a-roo!"

At this point the two girls, each carrying a glazed doughnut, exited of the doughnut shop. They sat on the curb below the street sign where Del stood.

"Sugary crumbs! Sugary crumbs," Del chanted.

He was about to join the girls, when Louis walked up to the curb. He stood behind the two sisters and called out, "Who wants a hurts doughnut?"

The older girl looked up and made a face. "That's so lame," she said.

But before she could stop him, the boy snatched the doughnut from her sister's hand.

The younger girl started to scream, and Louis started to laugh.

"But it still hurts doughnut," he said. Then he leaned against the street sign and stuffed the pastry into his mouth.

Del looked down from his perch. "Hoo! Hoo, Looooouis! That was cruuuel. But I know what tooo dooo about buuullies!"

While this was going on, Estelle stood on her streetlight, fussing with her feathers.

"I'll try and reform Del, that's what I'll do," she told herself. "I'll help him change his foul habits. After the rain cleans off his streetlight, I'll show him how to keep it tidy. I'll take him to the birdbath. Coo-a-roo! Yes, there's hope for Del. He's not a bad bird; he just needs some direction."

Estelle looked across the street. She saw Del standing on the ASHBY AVE sign. She saw him turn and raise his tail feathers. Lowering her gaze, she saw Louis leaning against the signpost. A school bus rolled by to block her view, but she knew what would happen next.

"Oh, Del!" she sighed.

Back on the street sign, Del leaned over. "Enjoy your whitewash, Looouis!" he called out. "Guano!"

Splat!

Louis felt something smack his forehead. He looked upward and--Splat!—more white gook splattered his nose.

“Whooops!” said Del.

“Oh, ick,” Louis cried, wiping his face with his sticky fingers.

The two girls on the curb howled with laughter.

Del flapped his striped wings. The girls looked up at him and laughed some more.

“Buuull’s-eye on the buuully!” he said.

5

Secret Sleeping Spots



Every pigeon has a secret sleeping spot. It might be a hole in a post, a crevice in a wall, or a crack in a chimney. Some pigeons sleep above windowsills, under bridges, or on ledges of tall skyscrapers. Wherever the place, it's a well-hidden, and that's why people rarely see pigeons during the nighttime. The birds have all gone off to their secret sleeping spots.

The sun had disappeared behind the intersection of College and Ashby. College students with laptops filled the Café Roma. Evening

joggers passed on the sidewalk, and buses carried people home from work.

A cool breeze ruffled Del's feathers as he view the evening from his streetlight perch. Recently he had found a sleeping spot that he thought was ideal. The day before, scaffolding had been erected against the front wall of the library. One scaffolding pipe near the top fit him perfectly. It was snug and warm and high enough off the ground to offer protection against predators.

"My neeew tuuube is the best pigeon hole in the neighborhood," Del told himself. "It's so well hidden, no one will ever know about it but me."

As the evening skies darkened, Estelle also remained on her streetlight. She pecked a grain of sand from a wing and looked toward Del's corner

"Del's so proud of that noisy pipe he sleeps in," she said. "Too bad that once the library is painted, the scaffolding will be removed and he will be homeless again."

Estelle peered longingly at a rhododendron bush in back of Wells Fargo Bank. She had called the leafy plant home for the past year. A fork in its trunk made the ideal secret sleeping spot, cozy, sturdy, and out of sight. An hour ago, she would have retreated to her bush hadn't Del's been acting so peculiar.

"Coo-a-roo! Del never stays up this late," she said. "And he's been watching my streetlight like a turkey vulture. What's he up to?"

Could he be wondering where I roost at night. Foolish coot. I bet he's worried that my sleeping spot might be better than his cold pipe."

At this point the streetlights along College and Ashby came on. Del walked to the edge of his light. An amber glow lit up his dark face.

"Your sleeping spot couldn't be better than my tuuube, Estelle," he said in his head. "And toonight, I'll proooove it. Toonight I'll follow yooou and see where yooou sleep." He shifted from foot to foot. "Coo! Hot foot! Hot foot! The light is getting toasty. Come on, Estelle, get moooving! Hot foot!"

Meanwhile Estelle faced Elmwood Movie Theater. "It's time to move," she said. "But my cozy bush will have to wait. I must find out what Del's up to."

Silently she soared from her perch. A short time later, a loud clatter of wings sounded from the direction of Del's streetlight. Estelle flew a half-block up College Avenue and landed on the movie theater's marquee, brightly lit at this time of night. Below her, a line of people stood at the ticket booth out front. Above, she heard Del land on the gutter.

"Just as I thought," she said. "That goony bird is following me. Well, Del, if you want to play a game tonight, let's play one Wild Goose Chase."

Del leaned forward to spy on Estelle. “Hoo! Hoo!,” he said. “Stealthy Del is on your tail, Estelle. Yooou won’t hear a sound from this shreeewd pigeon. This should be amuuusing.”

He watched Estelle fly off the marquee and glide across College Avenue. When she disappeared over the College Avenue Bookstore, he took off after her. He nearly ran into a power line before rising over the bookstore roof. There he spotted Estelle turn northward down Cherry Street.

“Woohoo,” he said. “The pursuuuit is on. But I can’t let Estelle get tooo far ahead or I’ll looose her.”

Winging up Cherry Street, Estelle slowed her pace. “If I don’t slow down, Del will lose me,” she said. “Pokey pigeon. You really should be in better shape, Del.”

When she heard Del’s clapping wing again, Estelle cut eastward up a driveway. By now, night had fallen and stars twinkled in the purple sky.

“Coo-a-roo! Night flights are so pleasant,” she said. “I hope Del is enjoying this as much as I am.”

Meanwhile a block behind Estelle, Del was flying low to the ground. “Oooo, I’m poooped and my wings ache!” he said.

He followed Estelle up the driveway and over a housetop. He flew through a backyard, over a tall fence, down another driveway, across a street, and into a vacant lot.

“Why’d yooou chooose a sleeping spot so far from our intersection, Estelle?” he griped. “Oooo! I should leave night flying to the gooofy owls.”

A hundred yards ahead Estelle turned eastward and flew across a supermarket parking lot. She landed upon a mailbox and waited for Del to catch up.

“I hear Del’s wing beat slowing down,” she said. “Time to end this Wild Goose Chase.”

Shortly after Estelle left the mailbox, Del landed on the same spot. “Where am I? I’m lost!” he said. He caught sight of Estelle flying up a side street. “Estelle, this is yooour fault. Coos! How can I find my way back to my pigeonhole pipe? Estelle! Don’t get tooo far ahead. Coos! Coos! Wait up, Estelle!”

Del took off down the street. Two blocks later, he spotted Estelle standing on the sidewalk in the glow of a streetlight. He recognized the sidewalk and he recognized the building behind it. He landed on a familiar fire hydrant.

“Coos! That’s the library and there’s the scaffolding. And Estelle is standing right below my... Coos!”

With a final flap of his wings, Del flew toward the grid of pipes and planks erected against the front of the library. He landed on the lead pipe that served as his new secret sleeping spot.

While Del backed into the pipe, Estelle spread her checkered wings. Without turning her head, she glided into the shadows.

“Yes, Del is no homing pigeon,” she said.

6

Nephew Mel



Del checked the sun. Café Roma would soon fill with lunchtime eaters. On this sunny day the people would dine outside and flick sandwich corners or an end of a French fry to any pigeon standing on the sidewalk. Del was watching a waiter set one of the outside tables when a cream-colored pigeon landed on a nearby newspaper rack.

“Yahooo! It’s Mel!” he said. “Good to see yooou again nephewwww.”

The new pigeon fluttered his dabbled wings and rose onto Del's streetlight.

"What're yooou in the mood for tooday, Mel?" Del asked. "The one thing that beats noon snacks is the opportuuunity to give my nepheew a pigeon eduuucation!"

From the opposite street corner Estelle watched Del and his nephew.

"Oh bother, Mel's here," she said. "The only thing that would keep Del from lunch handouts is the chance to show off to his kin."

Estelle watched Del and Mel fly off the streetlight. Flapping their wings loud enough to be heard over the traffic, they circled the intersection.

"Coo-a roo! What Del calls a pigeon education, is really teaching Mel pigeon pranks. Each time those birds-of-a feather get together, more pigeon prevention spikes appear on the ledges in the neighborhood. Coo-a-roo! What mischief will Del and Mel get into today?"

Del, with Mel following, continued to loop around the four corners of College and Ashby.

"Yooohooo, Estelle!" Del called as he passed her streetlight. "Enjoy your uuusual boring day. Woohooo! I'm off to give my nepheew some pigeon schoooling. Birds of a feather—coo!—goof around tooogether."

The pair tore up College Avenue. Ten minutes later, they arrived at Elmwood Elementary School. Lunch recess was in progress, and the two pigeons perched on the chain-linked fence surrounding the playground.

“First lesson for toooday, nepheew,” said Del. “Pigeons have a repuuation among grownup huumans. They viceew us as hardy urban survivors whooo go where we want and do what we will. It’s our duuuty tooo live up tooo this huuman viceew of us. Watch this.”

With a single flap of his wings, Del glided onto the playground. He landed near the swings. At once two kindergartners charged after him.

“Coo! Coo! Can’t catch me! Can’t catch me!” Del said, running the other way.

Soon three first-graders joined the chase, screaming and waving their arms. When one of them was about to catch the pigeon, he flew toward the slide and the chase began again.

“Coo! Coo! Catch me! Catch me!”

The duty teacher frowned and blew her whistle.

“Settle down, children,” she called out. “Shoo, bird! Shoo! Shoo!”

With the students still screaming, Del flew back to Mel on the fence. “Woohoo!” he said. “And that’s how yooou get the respect of a teacher, nepheew. Ready for more eduuucation?”

Meanwhile back at the intersection at College and Ashby, Estelle was enjoying a quiet afternoon. Below her, she spotted a woman standing at the bank's ATM machine. A baby, strapped onto the woman's back, was smiling at the sun.

"Pigeon have such a poor reputation among big people," Estelle said to herself. "They think of us as city pests. Pigeon-toes, pigeon-hearted, stool pigeon—what insulting expressions they have that use our good name. I must do my part to improve people's attitude toward us."

She swooped down and landed on the sidewalk behind the woman.

"Coo-coo-rooo!" she called to the baby.

The baby babbled some words to the bird.

"Coo-coo-rooo!" Estelle repeated.

The woman turned. "Pi...geon," she said to her infant.

"Pi...geon."

"Coo-coo-rooo! Coo-coo-rooo!" went Estelle.

The baby giggled and clapped his hands.

Flapping her checkered wings, Estelle rose straight into the air.

"Pigeon," the woman repeated, and the baby kept smiling.

While this was going on, Del and Mel landed on a power line directly above a row of parked cars.

“Woohoo! Here’s lesson number twooo, nepheew,” he said. “It’s called Scoot Pooping. Pigeons around the world are known for this.” He raised his tail feathers and bent forward. “Guano!”

A white glob dropped onto the windshield of the first parked car. Del scooted down the wire a few yards and raised his tail again. “Guano!”

More white gunk smacked a second windshield. With Mel following, Del slid down the power line and fouled a third and forth car as well. One after another he whitewashed windshields until he came to the last car in the row. A bald man sat in the driver’s seat.

“Hoohoo! Come join me, Mel,” he said. “Birds of a feather poopoo tooogether. Guano!”

When the white blobs landed on the windshield, the man leaned out the window and shook a finger at Del.

”Filthy birds!” he shouted. “Flying rats! ”

“Woohoo! Six cars in under a minute, nephewww!” Del said. “A neeew pigeon record.”

Not far from the power line, Estelle landed in a vegetable garden behind a small brown house. An old man wearing a straw hat was tying tomato plants to bamboo stakes.

“Howdy, bird,” he called out to Estelle.

“Coo-coo-roo!” went Estelle.

Raising her tail feathers, she left a spot of white by a carrot plant.

The man pushed back his hat with a thumb. "Well, now," he said. "That will make fine fertilizer for my vegetables."

Estelle stuck her beak in a puddle of water. She took a long drink, proud of the fact that a pigeon is one of the few birds that can suck up water by using their beaks like straws. Then she strutted to a clump of crab grass at the edge of the yard. The weed had gone to seed and she pecked at a seedy stalk.

"Eat all the seeds that you want, bird," said the man. "That'll save me some work when it's time for weeding."

"Coo-coo-roo!" said Estelle. "Pigeons in a yard are good value."

At that moment a dog began barking next door.

"For crying out loud," said the man. "What's started that hound howling?"

In the neighboring yard, a German shepherd, leashed to the porch, continued to bark. At the same time, he leaped upward trying to catch two pigeons, Del and Mel, who were fluttering around his head.

"Yahooo! Nice, poochie!" shouted Del. "This barking will rattle the whole neighborhood, Mel. Yahooo!"

As Del spoke, a blast of water struck his side. Looking toward the porch, he glimpsed a woman aiming a water hose at him.

"Go away pesky pigeons," she shouted. "Leave Buster alone!"

His feathers soaked, Del fell to the grass. The hose continued to douse him until he managed to fan his wings hard enough to fly away

from the woman and barking dog. Mel took off in the opposite direction.

A short time later Estelle stood on her streetlight at the intersection of Ashby and College. Looking up, she spotted Del fly onto his streetlight. She noted his wet and mussed feathers.

“What trouble have you gotten into, Del?” she asked herself. “Coo-a-roo! From the looks of you, the status of pigeons in this neighborhood took another dive.”

7

Estelle's Streetlight



The morning was breezy at the intersection of College and Ashby. Chilly gusts of wind buffeted Del's feathers as he stood on his streetlight.

"Coo! It's tooo blowy for a pigeon to perch here toooday," he said. "I'll go find a sturdy wall tooo stand behind."

Del looked toward Estelle's streetlight. He was surprised to find Estelle not there. Instead, a blue utility truck was parked at the corner. A crane with a yellow basket attached to the end extended

from the truck up to light. In the basket stood a man wearing a yellow hard hat.

Del shifted from foot to foot. “What’s that man doooing?” he asked himself. “Why is he fooling with Estelle’s roost?” He searched the intersection. “And where did Estelle fly tooo?”

Del watched the man remove the streetlight’s glass bottom. He saw him reach into the lamp and pull out a coil of wires.

“Coo! He’s ruuining Estelle’s perch,” Del said. “She wouldn’t approoove of this. Coo!”

Del leaped off his streetlight. He flew across the intersection, calling, “Coo roo-c'too-coo!”

“Coo roo-c'too-coo!” he repeated, circling the man’s head.

The man waved a screwdriver at Del. “Pesky pigeon!” he yelled. “Let me do my job.”

After twisting some wires, the man replaced the glass bottom of the light. With Del still winging around him, he lowered the basket to the blue truck.

“Pesky pigeon!”

Del fluttered onto the roof of Wells Fargo Bank. A blast of wind shoved him sideways as he watched the blue truck drive away. “Coo! Now that Estelle’s perch is safe, I can find a sturdy wall tooo stand behind.”

No sooner had he said this, however, than a large crow sailed into the intersection. It dipped its black wings and settled on Estelle's streetlight.

"Caw-cawww," it called. "Caw-cawww."

"Hey, yooou! That roost is taken," Del yelled. "Shooo, bird. Go back to your corn field."

The crow ignored Del. He remained on the streetlight, enjoying the wafts of wind that whisked his shiny black feathers.

"Caw-cawww!"

"Coo! Kooky crows are hard to remooove," Del told himself. "What can I dooo? What if Estelle comes back and sees her streetlight occuupied. She'll leave the intersection. She'll fly tooo another neighborhooood."

Now a red fire engine came barreling down College Avenue. Its siren blared. The noise apparently disturbed the crow, for it rose off the streetlight. It hung in the stiff breeze like a black kite before sailing westward.

"Woohoo! Toot-a-looo, crow!" called Del. "Spooked by a little noise? What a looser!"

Still the wind whipped through the intersection. Del watched as a plastic grocery bag swirled off the sidewalk and floated across Ashby Avenue. When it reached the corner it hooked onto Estelle's streetlight. There it hung, flapping in the breeze like an inflated flag.

“This won’t dooo,” Del said. “Estelle is fussy about where she perches.”

Again Del flew onto Estelle’s streetlight. Despite the breeze blasting his backside, he pecked at the plastic bag. Finally it came free and drifted down College Avenue.

“Del to the rescuuue!” said Del, returning to the bank roof. “Now Estelle, where are yooou?”

All gusty afternoon Del remained at Estelle’s corner. Each time he tried flying to a sheltered spot, something else threatened the streetlight. A swaying tree branch almost swatted it. A tall semi-truck came too close to swiping it, and a boy waiting at the crosswalk nearly hit it with a tennis ball. Del cooed a warning to make sure he wouldn’t toss it upward again.

“Whooo kneeew how hazardous Estelle’s corner could be?” Del said.

At sunset the wind died. As the sun slid behind Café Roma, Del spotted Estelle flying up Ashby Avenue. He quickly returned to his corner of the intersection.

Estelle landed on her streetlight and fluffed out her feathers. “How lucky I am to have a safe and agreeable perch to return to after such a blustery day,” she told herself. She peered across the intersection. “I wonder what Del did all blowy day. I hope he found a comfortable wall to stand behind.”

8

The Bridge



Del shifted from one red foot to the other. He looked down College Avenue and looked up Ashby Avenue.

“Coo! How gloomy! Every day is the uuusuuual,” he said. “The uuusuuual people on bicycles. The uuusuuual dogs on leashes. The uuusuuual man standing on the corner asking for change. Coo! I feel cooped up. I need a neeeew adventure! A neeeew viceew of the world.”

At the opposite corner, Estelle stood on her streetlight, cooing softly.

“I love the daily routine of this intersection,” she said. “There goes the red bike that passes each morning. There’s the gray poodle who walks by at sunrise, and if the old man on the corner wasn’t there I’d miss him.”

Meanwhile Del looked westward over the roof of Café Roma. In the distance he spotted the long bridge spanning San Francisco Bay.

“I know what I’ll dooo,” he said. “I’ll fly tooo the huuuge city. And I won’t take the uuusuual roooute. I won’t fly straight across the bay as crows dooo. Woohoo! No, I’ll follow the bridge. How’s that for daring dooo, Estelle?”

Del spread his striped wings and flapped off the streetlight. “Yahooo! Big city here I come!” he cried out.

From her perch, Estelle heard Del. She cocked her head and watched him fly down Ashby Avenue.

“Del has been in a restless mood lately,” she told herself. “Could that foolhardy bird be flying to San Francisco? Coo-a-roo! He has no idea what perils await a pigeon in that place. Too much traffic. Too many windows to run into. Too many pigeon haters. No doubt, Del will need help! Although I hate leaving the neighborhood, a pigeon must do what a pigeon must do.”

Estelle spread her checkered wings. She glimpsed Del’s white rump a half block up Ashby Avenue and sailed after him.

Ahead, Del flew block by block up the busy street. He was too excited to stop. He fluttered across Telegraph Av, soared over Shattuck Av, and turned left at Sixth Street.

“Only the boldest pigeon would uuuse the bridge roooute,” he said. “That’s what makes Del the smooothest, cooolest pigeon on the bay. If only Estelle could see me now.”

Perched on a wire fence, Estelle watched Del fly along Interstate 80 toward the Bay Bridge.

“Foolish coot!” she said. “He’s going to cross the bridge. He has no idea how dangerous that is. Wind currents! Flying debris! Coo-a-roo! And worst of all the merlins... otherwise known as pigeon hawks. Oh, Del, give it up. Let’s return to the intersection.”

Ten minutes later, Del reached the start of the Bay Bridge. He landed on the roof of a tollbooth. Car after car stopped at the window to hand money to the toll taker.

“Yahooo! The bridge is busy toooday,” Del said. “More people tooo see my daring doooo. I’ll give them a show to remember their commuuute by.”

Del took off across the steel structure. Below him, fourteen lanes of traffic crossed with him. He hooked to the left and to the right. He flew a loop the loop and swooped downward nearly tapping the top of a semi-truck.

“Waahooo! Look at me, huumans,” he said. “I’m Del, the smoothest, coolest pigeon by the bay. I’m as loose as a goose, as fluid as a bluebird.”

While Del did his aerial stunts, Estelle trailed him at a safe distance.

“Loony bird,” she said. “One gust of wind and he’ll be a pile of feathers on the pavement.

Two tall towers connected by iron girders rose on each side of the roadway. Del landed on one crossbeam, while Estelle, unseen, landed on the girder below. Trucks, cars, and buses roared beneath them. A strong crosswind played a their feathers.

Del studied the web of iron overhead. “Coo! So many suuper pigeon roosts,” he said. “Woohoo! But I’ll whoosh to the perch at the very top!”

A pigeon is one of the few birds that can fly straight upward, and that’s what Del did. Flapping his wings hard, he flew higher and higher, passing beam after beam.

“Yahoo! Look at me, suuper Del!” he called.

Little did he know, however, but he wasn’t alone at those heights. Eyeing him from the northern tower was a small, brown falcon, a merlin. The pigeon hawk’s head swiveled right and left. Its short hooked beak opened and its round yellow eyes blinked.

“Yahoo! Look where I am!” shouted Del.

Although Del didn't see the merlin, Estelle, also perched on the northern tower, did.

"Del, you fool-hearted bird," she said. "A pigeon-eating pigeon hawk has his eyes fixed on you. Coo-a-roo! And a pigeon must do what a pigeon must do."

Estelle looked side to side. Nearby, where two iron beams joined, she spotted a narrow slit, an opening about four-inches wide, big enough for her to slip through but not the merlin.

No time to lose. Clapping her wings, she took off. She flew under the compact falcon, straight toward the cranny.

"Coo-a-roo!" she called. "Coo-a-rooo!"

The pigeon hawk spied the closer prey and spread its pointed wings. Silently it leaped off the beam and shot toward Estelle.

"Coo-a-roo!"

The merlin came faster than Estelle expected. Within seconds, its sharp talons sunk into her wing. She twisted her body, but the claws held. Only by jerking her wings downward did she managed to free herself. She reached the opening and pushed herself inside. The pigeon hawk swished past.

"Coo-a-roo," Estelle said softly.

She counted to ten before sticking out her beck. She saw the merlin soaring toward the eastern shore. But was Del safe? Yes, there he was the topmost beam of the bridge.

“Woohoo!” De; shouted. “If only Estelle could see me now!
She’d know whooo’s the smooothest coolest pigeon on the bay.”

9

The Pier



Del continued his flight across the bridge. He now had a clear view of San Francisco skyline. “Pheew! What a viceew!” he said. Beauuuutiful!”

Along the embankment, stood a large white building with a big clock tower. A sign read:

PORT OF SAN FRANCISCO.

Behind the building a cement ferry pier reached into the bay. On the pier people were picnicking at wooden tables.

Del cut across the water toward the pier. “Halleluuujah!” he shouted. “Pigeon food, and I’m famished.”

In the meantime, Estelle watched Del glide toward the picnikers.

“That pig-headed pigeon has no idea what perils await a pigeon on that pier,” she said. “That’s seagull territory.” Then, with a longing glance toward the eastern shore, she flapped after Del.

A short time later, Del landed on the ferry pier. He stood there bobbing his head. The sights, sounds, and smells overwhelmed him. A man in sandals almost stepped on his tail feathers before he collected his senses and fluttered toward a picnic table.

“Woohoo! Sourdough bread! Fresh seafood!” Del yelled. “Toss me your crusts! Your sandwich corners! Coooo! And best of all, the tips of your ice cream cones!”

A small girl sitting at the end of the table spotted the pigeon. She flung a pretzel toward him.”

“Woohoo! All for me!” Del cried, and raced toward the snack.

He was about to stab at the pretzel when a dark shadow fell upon him. The next thing he knew—swoosh!—a large white form had snatched the piece from under his beak.

Confused, Del strutted in a circle. His head rocked to and fro. “Coo! Coo!” he said. “Whooo did that? Coo!”

He looked up to see a fat seagull standing on a wooden piling. The pretzel stuck out of its long yellow beak.

“No fair! I had dibs on that foood! Coo!”

Del flew to a table on the far side of the pier. Here a woman in a wheelchair tossed him an oyster cracker.

“Dibs! I got dibs!” he cried. But again, before he could reach the cracker, the seagull swooped down and grabbed it.

“Foul! No fair!” said Del, racing to another table.

This time a man in shorts tossed him a grape, and the seagull had it in its beak before it hit the ground.

“Ruuude bruuute!” Del cried. “Let’s share! Wait your turn!”

As Del hurried table to table, Estelle watched from the roof of the Ferry Building. Time after time, she saw the seagull rob him of any handout. The people at the tables laughed as they tossed Del more scraps—pizza crusts, onion rings, ends of hot dog buns--only to see the seagull grab them from him and fly to the piling.

“Coo-a-roo! This is huumiliating,” she said. “Del, where is your pigeon pride? Fly out of there, foolish coot.”

“I got to get out of here,” said Del, as another seagull hovered over him. “Foood everywhere but not a morsel for poor Del.”

Fanning his wing, he fluttered over the Ferry Building. He landed under a palm tree by some trolley car tracks.

“Coo! I’ll starve in this city if I don’t get some foood,” he cried. “Poor, Del. Coo! What am I tooo dooo! Poor, poor pigeon.”

As Del sulked, something struck his backside. He turned to find the heel of a sourdough bread loaf lying in the grass.

“Yahooo! All for me!” he said, and sunk his beak into the soft, white bread.

When he came up for air, his face was full of crumbs. He looked around and saw no other birds.

“Booohooo, gulls,” he called out. “No sourdough bread for yooou! It’s all for Del, the smooothest, cooolest pigeon on the bay.”

Perched on a palm frond directly overhead, Estelle looked down at Del. She dropped a second chunk of bread onto his back.

“Pig out, pigeon,” she said to herself. “You’ll need the energy to fly home.”

10

Union Square



Following the trolley tracks, Del flew up Market Street. His next stop was Union Square.

“Union Square is the heart of San Francisco action,” he said. “Coo! Oodles of big city pigeons hang out at Union Square, so that’s where this cool pigeon should be.”

When Del arrived, he found pigeons of all colors and sizes strutting around the large cement area. A flock flew in formation between tall department stores that surrounded the square. Another

group had gathered around an old man wearing a black beret who was tossing them breadcrumbs.

Del landed on a sunny corner of the square. He noticed that pigeons occupied the choicest perches, the lampposts, the café umbrellas, and the tops of the modern art sculptures. A large dark-blue pigeon stood on the prize perch, the head of a golden statue mounted upon a tall column in the center of the square.

“Coo! Whooo does that bluuue duuude think he is?” Del asked himself. “That’s where this smoooth pigeon belongs.”

Del fluttered over to the outdoor café to join some pigeons milling under the round tables. He had never walked among such a large and varied flock before. He marveled at the different shades of feathers—watery blue, dusty gray, rusty red, vanilla white, and dirty brown.

“Del’s the name,” he said to a speckled pigeon with splashes of blue on his gray wings. “I just fleeeew the bridge rouuute across the bay. Smoooth sailing all the way.”

But the speckled pigeon strutted away without a glance in Del’s direction.

“Hoo! Hoo!” said Del. “Bad attituuude.”

Next he approached a light-blue pigeon with dark gray wings. “Coo! I’m neeew to the city,” he said, “Cooould yooou tell me the best place for a handout?”

This pigeon also ignored Del and stalked away with his head bobbing and his beak in the air.

“Snoooty! Snoooty!” said Del.

All this while, Estelle stood on the awning of the San Francisco Hotel. This perch, across the street from Union, offered a clear view of the outdoor cafe. She watched Del try to strike up a conversation with a reddish pigeon that fluttered away before he finished his first sentence.

“Oh, Del, those vain city pigeons don’t care about you,” she said. “Let’s return to the intersection. That’s where everything is familiar. Everything is safe.”

Careful to avoid Del’s notice, Estelle sailed from the hotel into the square. She landed among the pigeons by the cafe, close enough to Del to keep an eye on him.

A blond woman, ignoring a DO NOT FEED THE PIGEONS sign, brushed breadcrumbs off her table. Instantly the pigeon hoard pounced upon the specks of bread.

“Hoo! Hoo!” said Del, joining the feeding frenzy.

As he ate, he noticed a milky-white female pigeon with pink eyes.

Puffing out his neck feathers, he approached her. “Coo! How dooo yooou dooo?” he said. “Del’s the name. Have we met before? Coo!”

The white pigeon stepped quickly away.

Del bowed his head and strutted after her. “Yoo-hoo! Let’s talk,” he said. “Coo! Coo! How dooo yooou like the twooo crossbars on my wings?”

With Del on her tail, the girl pigeon strode toward the column in the center of the square.

“Hey, cuuutey, wait up,” Del called. “How about if yooou and I fly to Fisherman’s Wharf for a moonlit cruuuiise around the bay? Coo!”

Meanwhile, Estelle, standing on a table umbrella, watched Del chase the pink-eyed pigeon. “Foolish coot,” she said. “That birdie is leading you somewhere and I sense trouble.”

Estelle scanned the square. Three people sat on a cement wall reading paperback books, but they weren’t interested in pigeons. A line of school children filed by, but their teacher was keeping a sharp eye on them.

Next Estelle’s gaze ran up the tall central column. The blue pigeon on the golden head was leaning forward. His dark head slowly lowered, following Del’s every move. He spread his dark wings and dropped straight downward.

“Oh, Del,” said Estelle. “You picked the wrong bird to flirt with.”

At this point Del stood near the base of the column. One moment he was trying to attract the white pigeon’s attention, and the next the big blue pigeon stood before him beak to beak.

“Coo!” Del said. “Moove out of my way, pal.”

The larger bird replied with a hard peck on Del’s head.

“Hey, coool it,” said Del. “Don’t get your hackles up.”

Again the blue pigeon bird stabbed Del’s forehead. Peck after peck landed on his cheeks and neck.

“Ouch! Oooo,” Del yelled. “I get your point, Pal.”

By now the blue pigeon had Del back against the base of the column. The pecking came hard and fast. Try as he might, Del couldn’t find room to spread his wings and fly away.

“Coo! I give,” he said. “Uncle! Uncle!”

But the blue pigeon kept stabbing Del and it hurt. Del was feeling that one more peck would be the end of him, when—flap! flap! flap!—something blocked his view. Pigeon wings! A pair of familiar wings, white checkered, was flapping in front of him. The call that he heard, “Coo-a-roo!” was also familiar.

“Estelle!” Del yelled. “Estelle is that yooou? Help Estelle!”

The next thing Del knew Estelle was standing by his side. The blue pigeon had flown away along with his pink-eyed mate. Estelle said nothing and Del said nothing. Without moving a feather, the birds stood watching the sun set behind the San Francisco Hotel.

As shadows darkened Union Square, pigeons, one by one, left for their secret sleeping spots. When only a few stragglers remained, Del looked toward the top of the central column. The statue’s head was vacant.

“Coo!” he went and Estelle nodded.

Fanning his wings, Del flew straight upward. Up, up he soared until he stood on the golden head. He turned a circle to take in the panorama of San Francisco.

“Coo!” he said aloud.

“Coo-a-roo!” Estelle returned.

Del looked down and saw Estelle, now the lone pigeon in Union Square.

“Coo!” he repeated. “That was a lot for a pigeon tooo dooo. Thank yooou, Estelle.”

11

Hatchlings



Estelle lay on a high windowsill behind College Avenue Bookstore. Del flew onto the ledge and dropped a twig by her side.

“Coo! Will this dooo, Estelle?” he asked.

With her beak, Estelle tucked the twig beneath her side.

“That will do very well, Del,” she said. “Now off you go again. Scoot. We have much work to do.”

Del took off and returned with a blade of dried grass in his beak. He placed it by Estelle’s side and left again. He brought dead

leaves, pine needles, and scraps of paper. During one trip, he spotted a muffin on the sidewalk, but he ignored it and went to find more twigs.

Little by little, after Estelle tucked each item around her, the pair built a nest.

“It looks tooo flimsy, Estelle,” Del said. “Is it strong enough? Is there enough rooom?”

“It’s a very good pigeon nest, Del,” said Estelle. “Now remember your duty. You’re the lookout, while I do my job.”

Del and Estelle touched beaks.

“Coo!” said Del.

For the next two days Del rarely left Estelle side. In the daytime he flew with her in search of seeds and grain. At night he lay next to the nest, rubbing Estelle’s shining neck feathers with his beak. Even when it rained and his feathers soaked through, he remained on the windowsill, looking out for predators.

On the morning of the third day, Estelle gave a soft “Coo-a-roo,” and stood. A small white egg lay in the nest.

“Woohoo!” cried Del. “An egg!”

“I know, Del,” Estelle replied.

Estelle walked to the edge of the windowsill and spread her checkered wings.

“Where are you going, Estelle?” asked Del. “We can’t leave our egg.”

“Of course not, Del. But I need food. You must sit on the nest while I’m away. This evening we’ll switch places.”

“I’ll dooo my duuuty,” said Del.

All morning, Del sat on the egg. That afternoon, even though it was Thursday, Popcorn Lady Day, he refused to budge from the nest.

In the late afternoon, Estelle returned to the sill.

“Coo-a-roo!” she said.

Del leaped up. “Foood time! Yahooo!”

“If you hurry, some popcorn remains by the bus stop,” said Estelle.

The next morning a second white egg lay in the nest.

“Twoooo eggs!” Del announced.

“I know, Del,” Estelle returned.

Again that day, Del sat on the nest keeping the eggs warm while Estelle went for food. Around noon his nephew Mel dropped by for some pigeon lessons, but still Del refused to leave the ledge.

“Coo! I know what I must dooo for Estelle and our fuuuture brood,” he explained.

In the late afternoon, Estelle returned, and Del flew off to eat. This routine went on for sixteen days and never once were the eggs uncovered for more than a minute.

Early in the morning of the seventeenth day, Estelle let out a loud, “Coo-a-roo!”

Del woke up to find her standing by the nest. One of the eggs wobbled.

“It’s moooving, Estelle,” he said.

“I know, Del,” said Estelle.

At one end of the egg a small hole appeared. Inside the hole, a tiny beak was pecking at the eggshell. For the next two hours, Del and Estelle watched the beak make the hole bigger.

Toward noon, the second egg moved. A small hole appeared at its end as well.

“Loook, Estelle!” Del cried.

“Yes, yes, Del.”

All that day the two pigeons stood watching their eggs. Little by little they saw more of the wet hatchlings struggling inside them. Just after sunset, a small head pop out of the first egg. Shortly afterward a shriveled body covered with yellow fuzz emerged. Two paddle-like wings flipped up and down on its sides. It tried to stand, but flopped over.

“A healthy boy,” said Estelle.

“But he’s bald,” said Del.

“His feathers will grow in a few weeks,” Estelle explained.

The second egg produced a girl pigeon. This tiny hatchling, along with her brother, soon stood upright in the nest. Both birds peeped softly. Both birds stretched their necks toward their parents with open mouths.

“We must prepare their first meal, Del,” Estelle said.

“Coo! But first our beauuutiful hatchlings need names,” said Del.

“Of course,” said Estelle. “Let’s name our girl, Belle.”

“And can we name our boy Cornell?” Del asked.

“Belle and Cornell,” said Estelle. “Those are very good names.”

Del and Estelle touched beaks.

“Coo!” said Del.