

DEL & ESTELLE

SERIALIZED

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 the 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 that stopped at a red light.

“Woohoo!” he said. “Toooday is Tuuuesday, trash remoooval 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 mourning 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 perch 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. Coo! And twooo scoops of something gooey. Poor Estelle. I suppose she’s going throoough her uuusual morning health rouuutine.”

Del hopped onto a chunk 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 scooper!”

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 tuube of toothpaste. 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 poops me out," he said. "This roost is a suuper spot to snooze throough 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 uncoool. 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 passed 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 sunflower seeds onto the sidewalk. Estelle joined five song sparrows at 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."

