

DEL & ESTELLE

SERIALIZED

10

UNION SQUARE

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

“Uuunion Square is the heart of San Francisco action,” he said. “Coo! Ooodles of big city pigeons hang out at Uuunion Square, so that’s where this coool 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 cruuuse 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. "Mooove out of my way, pal."

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

"Hey, cool 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," said Del. "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.”

