

DEL & ESTELLE
SERIALIZED
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's 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. “Food 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.

“Twooo 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 popped 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 beautiful 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.

