

DEL & ESTELLE
SERIALIZED
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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 stuudents 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 totally stained 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. Coo! 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 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 screaming, and Louis began laughing.

"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.

