

DEL & ESTELLE
SERIALIZED
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 veeeew 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 uuusuuual 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 use the bridge route," he said. "That's what makes Del the smoothest, coolest 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 today," Del said. "More people too see my daring dooo. I'll give them a show to remember their commute 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, humans," 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 on their feathers.

Del studied the web of iron overhead. "Coo! So many suuuper pigeon rooosts," he said. "Woohoo! But I'll whooosh 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, suuuper Del!" he called.

Little did he know, however, that 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 foolish 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 sank into her wing. She twisted her body, but the claws held. Only by jerking her wings downward did she manage 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 neck. She saw the merlin soaring toward the eastern shore. But was Del safe? Yes, there he was on the topmost beam of the bridge.

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

