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ADVENTURE IN FRIENDSHIP

by
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Photos by William L. Finley

Sometimes one travels a long way into far fields for an adventure. Sometimes it comes to your door. It may loom large, exciting, hazardous. Then again, it may come like a thin thread across space asking to be let in.

In a roomy wire cage on our lawn under a big maple tree, a mourning dove hops up to his perch about the time dusk falls and goes to bed alone. He is such a mite that one has to look twice to see him. But he puts on an air of bravado and contentment, shuffles his bed feathers and settles down on his small red feet as if he wasn't afraid to be alone in the dark. If one goes close, he can see big, round eyes peering out with the expression of a lonely child. The big, dark world must seem overwhelming, the black shadows under the nearby grape arbor, the rustling of the leaves over his head; and that mellow, rippling call of the screech owl down the hill must chill him to the bone.

Dickey Dove has not been alone long in his cage. Two days ago he had a "big brother," Peter, a band-tailed pigeon. Peter, iridescent and arrogant, was three times the size of the demurely colored dove, and he was a bully. When the little one wanted to cuddle up to him at night, he reached down and ^{crowd} pecked him as if saying, "Don't ^{so}, you little snip. You disturb my meditations on how I'm going to get out of this interment camp."

Both birds came to visit us from the Pittock Bird Sanctuary, that over-worked convalescent home for unfortunate feathered ones, that would be very grateful for a helping hand from its bird friends. Peter, the pigeon, was found on the ground in their grove of trees by Mr. and Mrs. S. E. Hall of 3925 N. E. Maywood Place, and brought to the sanctuary. A wing was injured and he could not fly, so he was easy meat for a hawk or a meandering cat. Dickey, the dove, was found by Mrs. Ada Muir of 2224 S. E. Eighth Avenue, and having no way to transport him, the Humane Society brought him to the bird hospital. He had been shot by some careless boy with an air-gun and the little slug hit him in the breast and punctured the craw. For some time he could not eat and nearly

starved. Even now he is a runt bird. The wound finally healed and Dickey is making up for lost time. He pitches into the egg and wheat-germ mash, eats till he pds out in front, his face smeared with gooey food.

One day Peter was badgering Dickey and pushing him about the cage. In his excitement, Dickey slipped through a little hole in the wires made by the every-day sparrow boarders, and escaped into the garden shrubs. He must have been bewildered and scared, for two days later we found him back at the door of the cage trying to get in. It was better to be heckled than hit by some blitzkrieg from the sky. Peter seemed glad to have him back, a half grudging apology. He walked around on the grassy floor talking in a nasal twang, and that night, the last one, the dove was snuggled up close to him.

The next day we took both of the birds out to get pictures. They were accustomed to being handled and took it as a sort of an outing. I held one in each hand while the cameras were being made ready. Peter affected an indifference to these movements. His eyes were turned to the trees and the river. All at once, he jerked away and sprang off in strong, straight flight, landing in the top of a tall fir. Even with a weak wing, will power found a way.

After a few snap-shots, Dickey went back into the cage. The door was left open in the hope that Peter might return and that the dove might go if he was ready and had the courage of the bigger bird. He has lived alone in the cage for several days and still lingers, pattering about and taking dust baths between meals. His door is closed at night for fear that musical owl might slip in.

The domestic life of the dove is exemplary. Winding in and out searching the thorny cats-claw, mesquites, and the murderous cacti of the Arizona desert, I walked close up to an old jumping cactus with a bushy top, when something alive fluttered off a limb and with a broken wing went dragging away in a devious course. The tell-tale marks were her small size, olive-brown color, and black-spotted wings - a mourning dove. Poor thing!

Behind some bushes, she got well and whistled away in a curving flight. In the nest, perched on its narrow parapet, were two pin-feathered, pudgy nestlings with round heads, black bills, and gentle eyes. I glanced up into the lacy limbs

of a mesquite and saw the mother perched on a branch watching me. She would sit there till I departed. The half melancholy "Wheew-hewh- heeeeooco" of the male, softly far but near, pulsed from the mid-day thickets. This is his only note, made usually on the wing.

The nest of the mourning dove is a flimsy stick platform placed on a flat limb or in a crotch, and sometimes in the center of a cactus. It is an indifferent affair, through which upon looking up, one can see the eggs in the bottom. It is very easy for foes and friends alike to see, and for that reason one seldom does see it.

Mourning doves are very prolific and eggs may be found from February till September - or later. In the late summer and early autumn, the doves begin to gather in small flocks. Their food, taken mostly on the ground, consists almost exclusively of weed seeds and occasional grains. Their industry as weed destroyers is enormous. Sometimes it is the bearded foxtail, wood sorrel, and other mixed varieties, but mostly weeds. Against this wholly commendable record, think of the thousands of doves that are killed annually in regions where they are abundant. And this means almost over the whole country, for this bird is found in every state in the Union.

The dove is the universal symbol of gentleness and peace, a familiar and friendly bird whose calm, unafraid eyes should shame a hunter into dropping his own - and his raised gun. How could one shoot a robin-sized bird that trusts man's friendship and protection to the point of wanting to stay near him instead of living his own wild, free life? In this state, from September 1 to 15th, the mourning dove faces his doom.