





photo by t. talbot

# Pigeon Anguish

by jill dearman

I call myself an animal lover, but I actually hate the pigeon community. I was starting to develop a tiny bit of compassion toward these disease-carrying creatures until the morning I saw, on the corner of my balcony – between the concrete wall and a fake plant from Bed, Bath and Beyond – a pigeon sitting atop a small nest comprised of dead leaves and cigarette butts from my upstairs neighbors. In that nest, to my horror, lay two eggs.

The pigeon looked at me then, clearly challenged: “*What are you gonna do?*”

This moment had been a long time coming.

When my girlfriend and I moved into this luxury Midtown high-rise (where both Larry David and “the real Kramer” had at one time lived) we were thrilled that we’d lucked into one of the few apartments with a terrace. We’d been on the waiting list for eight years when we got the call: “An old lady died. Do you want her place or not?” Naturally we said yes, practically sight unseen. Naturally, two years after moving in, we broke up . . . amicably.

Part of what made it so amicable was that, along with our two cats, I got to keep the luxury apartment. I also kept the pigeons, who apparently had been getting three squares a day from the old lady and then my girlfriend.

My cats were in their golden years – although they had found a way to sit on the remote control and turn on the TV, they were no longer interested in their old predatory hobbies like scaring away varmints. As the cats snored on the couch (it was a couple of hours before *Regis and Kelly* started), I knew that I’d have to handle this crisis myself.

I put on boots, slipped my hand into a plastic bag, stomped onto the terrace and shooed Mama Bird away as I inched toward the blue-grey eggs. But I just couldn’t grab them. I had three good reasons:

1. I didn’t want to catch Avian Flu, Cryptococcal Meningitis, or the Macarena.
2. What if I tossed them down the incinerator and then came back in my next life as a hunted starling, or even a quail? This was the same week as the Cheney debacle; I couldn’t help but consider the possibility.

### 3. Mama Bird might kill me.

Five seconds after shooing Mama Bird away she was madly circling my terrace. She reminded me of my own fiercely protective mother (who now too was retired, and undoubtedly also catching some pre-*Regis and Kelly* zzz’s). Five seconds later another bird joined her (the pigeon, not my retired mother).

The thing was, I recognized these characters. Ever since moving in, two pigeons consistently perched on my terrace. I’d come to describe my fine, feathered tormentors (to an imaginary cop from *Law & Order: CBU – City Birds Unit*) as “The white one with messed-up head feathers,” and “His friend, the regular-looking one.”

Apparently they’d been more than just friends.

And now I was their enemy.

To scare them off, I pulled out a spray bottle of Fantastik and shot at the nest. Both birds went ballistic. They flew up to avoid the toxic formula (which really does work wonders on bathroom tile). But when they returned and their furious, beady red eyes met my dilated-in-terror brown ones, I knew that if we went *mano a mano* – or *mano a wing* – that I’d end up in the same position as Tippi Hedren in *The Birds*: one severely pecked human.

So I did what my mother raised me to do: I called Maintenance.

“Sit tight,” the dispatcher told me as he chewed his breakfast – probably eggs on a roll. “We’ll have someone up there in a couple of hours.”

What was I supposed to do during that time – boil water, gather up clean towels and tell Mama Bird to relax and keep breathing?

To light a fire under the Maintenance staff I did something else my mother raised me to do: I started crying.

“Okay, okay. Give me twenty minutes,” he relented.

To distract myself from looking out the window, I sent desperate e-mails to my new girlfriend and a few friends, telling them how disgusted and mortified I felt, and also swearing them to secrecy. Even though I’d moved on up, like The Jeffersons, to a “*deluxe apartment in the sky-high-high*,” facing this health hazard made me feel like I was back in the tenement apartment I was raised in, one paycheck away from poverty.

When the doorbell rang, I felt instantly relieved. Someone else would go out there and dispose of these devil-eggs. When I opened the door, a different terror set in. They’d sent Wilson, the maintenance worker with the loosest lips. A week after I moved in, he gave me the dish on all my neighbors’ odd habits and complaints. My secret was not safe with this stool pigeon.

“I need a shopping bag to pack the eggs in,” he said.

I thought more waterworks might buy his sympathy . . . and his silence.

“Paper or plastic?” I asked, as I proceeded to theatrically weep.

I discovered then that Wilson was not only a big mouth; he was also immune to a woman’s tears. “This is nothing,” he laughed heartily. “I’ve seen entire families of pigeons breed on some terraces.”

Was this supposed to make me feel better?

But in a few minutes I did. He’d scooped the eggs into a Lacoste shopping bag. I then escorted him to the compactor room and watched as he dumped the bag down the incinerator. I slipped him five bucks, thanked him, and wondered how long before one of my neighbors caught me in the elevator to say, “So, I heard about your pigeon problem.” 生