



# SOMEONE FEEDS THE PIGEONS

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The fountain in the park was a work of gray marble. Its panache lay in its simplicity and I frequented it often. But it wasn't the fountain that attracted me, though it did attract a flight of doves. They made a fine sight too, perfect against the backdrop of the sculpture spouting water. The intermingling shades of blue and gray were fine to look at but that's not why I came either. There was an old man. He had an enviable shock of hair—a beautiful pure white, and dressed in solemn shades of brown. A stoop had usurped him and arthritis gnarled the fingers that scattered the seeds. The point is, he fed the birds every day and did so with a delight that it made me come back for it again and again.

Every day when my watch would say seven past five, the old man's would tick five. I once asked him the time. I could see his hands dig into a bulging paper bag. The doves kept his time even better than me and their eyes would be trained on the same thing at the same time. I had made a niche for myself where the scene would be in my direct line of vision while I casually lounged against a tree. From there, I would watch the birds

arriving in droves, at the patiently waiting man's feet. As the avian crowd gained in number, an unconscious smile would start twitching on his face and it would finally break into a beam when a stray wing would scrape him in the hectic fuss of descent. The seeds rained on the fanning tails as the birds picked up with the speed of pecking till the paper bag had nothing more to offer. Emptying it did take quite a while which I used to study the old man. Throughout the feast, a profound satisfaction fledged across his face lighting it up till it positively glowed. He would become blissfully oblivious to everything but the sated birds. The world ceased its rat race as I watched it. Probably since happiness is akin to laughter as they are both infectious in the same way. Not to forget that there's a thing called crazy laughter, of course. The glee in the air was multiplied by the shared feelings of the birds. As they stuffed their beaks, they gabbed some too. I suspect I once heard a pigeon brag about how many people with newly washed hair had their days ruined.

Once the seeds were cleaned off, the man's assembly entertained him with their talk. They took dips in the crystal

water of the marble basin, the privileged feathered rascals, and showed off their plumage glistening in the setting sun. The man would pat a few downy heads and wish them a very good evening when it was time to leave at half past five. My watch claimed it to be seven minutes after but whatever.

A friend and I were supposed to meet up. "Five-ish", she'd decided over the phone. We were supposed to be trying a new cafe and the directions she texted me led me to a building adjacent to my usual rendezvous at that hour. While I was climbing the stairs to the tables on the terrace my friend's train was delayed. Nothing to be done except landing a table with a view. The streets familiar from aimlessly roaming so often looked interestingly different from a bird's vantage. Well, or from that of a person who has an apartment high up in a skyscraper and likes looking out the window I guess.

Either way, since I didn't live in a skyscraper, the panoramic sweep of people's heads and tops of cars fascinated me enough to keep irritation far away. Still, skyscraper or no, the street would've soon gotten dull all by itself but before that could happen I saw my tree. Or the

top of my regular haunt. I'd never seen the leaves at the very top before. They looked just like the leaves that I could see from below if you want to know but what I really looked or stared at, maybe, was the shock of white hair familiar in the same way. From here the old man seemed to be bending over a flowing carpet of gray that conjured up a bird every now and then. But once you've seen enough birds flutter out and swoop for the marble basin of water and back into the man's concert, it looked like an aggregation of birds canvassing the coming of winter with the concernedly bent back. But probably something less grim since even from this distance the vibe of good cheer was unmistakable. When the tight knit ring finally broke up, I could perceive contentment even in the old man's gait as he strolled away. The stride smacked oblivion to the people milling about him, some turning their heads in his direction, just like a happy being.

My friend was scandalously late by the way. But strangely enough I wasn't too angry. Definitely not nearly as angry as could be expected of me.

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