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My Search among the Birds

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My Search Among the Birds

Aug 19 It took the little birds—are they wrens?—about a week to find the seeds.

Aug 23 One day a pigeon joined them, he was larger and seemed “superior,” the wrens seemed “respectful,” as if they were deferring to him.

(later) I saw a bird in the bushes near Dairy Queen. It looked thin to me.

(later) There were about ten little wrens at work on the seed when someone on the street revved up a motorcycle—nine of the wrens instantly flew to the nearest tree, all together, but one little wren did not—he just stayed and kept on eating.

- a) was he smarter than the others?
- b) was he dumber than the others?
- c) was he simply deaf?

A minute later all the wrens in the tree flew off together and when the wren who stayed behind to work on the seed *saw* them (with his eyes) he instantly joined them—he didn’t want to be left behind! But when they were just going to the tree he hadn’t minded one bit.

Aug 24 A hawk circling very high up in the heavens.

Aug 25 Some of the birds have told me their names; the rest are so far quiet.

(later) I dare not log the amount of time I spend sitting on the ledge of the kitchen window, watching the wrens on the flat black asphalt roof where I have placed a red frisbee of water and a blue frisbee of seed.

Aug 26 They come for breakfast and they come for dinner. WHERE DO THEY GO FOR LUNCH?

Aug 28 Bought a pair of opera glasses to facilitate my search among the birds.

Aug 29 I replace the little golden seeds, for I have run out of them, with black oiled sunflower seeds, which everyone knows are superior and preferred by all birds. I do this in the middle of the night so as to “surprise” the birds in the morning. But in the morning they don’t act “surprised” at all, they act as if nothing’s changed. But then again, they may be “acting.”

(later) They ARE acting—the wrens don’t like the new seed, they are ignoring it! Do they KNOW how much work it took to lug that bag up the stairs?

Aug 30 Now the pigeon comes around and does a terrible thing, an inexplicable thing—he scatters all the seed by standing in the frisbee and with his head down in the seed swings his head from side to side, not eating but *sweeping* the seeds out of the frisbee and onto the roof, all over the roof; he seems angry, as if he’s searching for something he can’t find.

(later) The truth is, none of us really feed the birds because we care for them; we feed them because we like to watch.

(later) But was the PIGEON caring for the birds? Was the big bird caring for the little birds? Because now that the big seeds are SCATTERED, all the little wrens come and eat them joyfully off the roof.

Sept 1 Early this morning a cardinal appears out of nowhere, looking like Santa Claus.

(later) Suddenly it occurs to me this just might be the birds’ Christmas—I must do something quick, something special.

(later) Went out and bought six paper bags of French fries, carefully arranging them in the frisbee so their ends were up.

(later) A dove comes, a pale gray soft dove, smaller than the pigeons but larger than the wrens. Doves are lovebirds, how can they come in anything less than a pair? My medium dove must be a heartbroken one.

My French fries are eaten by the medium heartbroken dove.

Is there anything sadder than the sight of a medium heartbroken dove stuffed with French fries on Christmas morning?

Sept 2 Is there anything better, more beautiful, in all the world, across all the lands, over the Taj Mahal and everything, than two pigeons, ten wrens, a cardinal, and a medium heartbroken dove come to Ohio, to an asphalt roof, to eat potatoes on the day AFTER Christmas?

(later) A piece of available sky.

Sept 3 Wrens are described as having “upturned tail feathers,” that being their DISTINGUISHING feature, and my little brownish-gray birds do NOT—mine have flat, outgoing tails like musical reeds.

(later) Is it that we can never name that which we love?

Sept 4 I would look it up in a book, but it is a sin to look up that which you love in a book.

Sept 9 Most beautiful blackbird I’ve ever seen—sleek, all sheen, positively indigo head/throat, wearing a turquoise necklace on top of that!

Sept 10 Susan says the little wren-who-is-not-a-wren, the one who stayed to gorge while the others fled, was displaying “desperate gluttony,” a condition in which he repressed his deeper, more constant, tragic terror, out of which arose indomitable seed greediness, a mere symptom of deeper hungers. I think this means he stayed because he was MORE terrified than the others, not less.

Sept 11 One pigeon (rock dove!) is magnificently all brown in the body, but his tail is white. He looks like a horse.

Sept 12 On December 9, 1531, the Indian neophyte Juan Diego was lured to Mount Tepeyac by the sound of stunning music. He made his way to the top and the Virgin of Guadalupe appeared to him in radiant splendor. Could it have been a thrush?

Sept 13 This morning all the little gray-brown no-names looked fuzzier than usual—I thought they were baby chicks toddling in a barnyard.

Sept 14 The Bible says we are living through the greatest mass-extinction period in the planet's history.

Sept 15 When I buy my weekly bag of seeds at Ace Hardware, a 25-lb. bag for eight dollars and some cents, the man I buy them from carries the bag out to my car for me, and I thank him. This doesn't seem worth noting, except whenever it happens I have the distinct impression we are being watched.

Sept 17 I don't know what has happened, but all my little gray-browns have disappeared and a similar number of VERY PLUMP gray-browns have taken their place! Lined up on the telephone wire—which overhangs the roof—they look like a bunch of beer bottles, or a line of tits, which is the same thing.

Sept 18 Although all poets aspire to be birds, no bird aspires to be a poet.

Sept 19 If I don't feed them for a single day, they stop coming! And I look back over my life, to an autumn day years and years ago, when my (then) therapist told me there are very few things one can take personally; apparently I am still struggling with this.

Sept 20 Some days just to tell a bird from a tree is asking a lot.

Sept 21 Though this country was founded on principles of freedom, nowhere in the United States Constitution do they mention birds.

Sept 22 Kate and Pete keep frozen yellow finches in their freezer, in zip lock-bags, for the purposes of “drawing and photography.”

Sept 23 I lost my long brown wallet, and in it were my credit card, my debit card, my check book, my check book register, my video club card, my Osco card, my Grand Union card, my Co-op card, my oil-change card, my automobile club card, my driver’s license, my medical insurance card, my cash, my change, my slips and bits of paper with the names of books, films, and musical recordings I want to experience before I die, the names and numbers of human beings I could call if I were ever in an emergency or lost or sad, and when I lost my long brown wallet with all this stuff in it, I felt like a bird, and it was wonderful.

Sept 24 Eating dinner on the window ledge, I am watching my birds as I gnaw on a chicken thigh. There I am, chewing my dead bird in front of living birds. As soon as I realize this, I am ashamed, and keep on eating.

Sept 25 What if half the people you knew, and half the people you loved, were dead within a year? Last night on the phone Ralph was so depressed I didn’t know what to do, so I said, out of the blue, “Do you want to talk about the avian flu?”

(later) Sorrow thy name is sparrow.

Sept 27 With folded wings.

Sept 28 No more prayers. Say instead, as many times as you can, the word SPARROW. Soon you will be saying O SPARE O SPARE O SPARE O SPARE.

Sept 29 In the palm of the child’s hand is a bird.

(later) The Gypsies have a name for it.