

Good Mourning, Miss Dove

"Come quickly, Eddie, come quickly!

"What is it?" I shouted from the gallery.

"Come down!"

Sandra was standing in the curved bay, that looked out to the terrace, the reflecting pool, and the green Mediterranean landscape beyond.

"A terrible thump! He hit the window straight on – he's not moving,"

There in the boxwood beneath the window was a small dove, facing in the opposite direction and resting lopsided with one wing bent slightly as if for support.

"If he had broke his neck, he would have *died*, wouldn't he?"

"Yes", I said somewhat sheepishly startled by her observation.

"He's blinking his eyes, he's turning his head, he must be – *just* stunned..."

"Let's give him a moment", and we both walked away from the window and then came back.

"His tail looks crooked"

"Doves are quite flexible with their tails", I imparted.

As an amateur ornithologist since youth, I had watched doves preening, noting their ability to twist and turn their tails like a lady's fan, ever slightly askew.

We left him again, and went about our routine. It was hot out, a dry day with no wind. Sandra checked her e-mail, occasionally looking out the window. I futzed; debating if I wanted to go back to my study and finish whatever it was that was so important.

I had noticed that our visitor was young, but beyond being a juvenile. There were no pinfeathers, the beak was fully formed and his coloring was that of an adult, but not yet distinct enough to determine gender. I knew about *doves*. I had kept pigeons as a boy. My champion racer, Muldoon, was a stocky, almost muscular fellow, such a contrast to this frail subsistent cousin, who scraped for food and was not particularly a strong flyer; and seemingly lacked the intelligence of his superior domestically bred semi-captive relatives and their wild and free rock-dove cousins.

I still could not fathom what trajectory he hit the window at and why he would be flying at such a low altitude – straight toward our villa – to have collided with such blunt force in to the obtuse bay, but fortunately not hitting the center bay dead-on. He had to have had come up from below, from over the hill. He must have been in the air – if he had been perching across

the pool, he would have not gained enough speed to hit the window with such force. All I could think of was that reflected (or refracted) light had given him the illusion of a clear path.

“Should we feed him something”? Sandra offered.

Either he noticed or heard us, for at that moment he flew to the top of the rust colored gate that led to the formal garden and the faux Greek temple, where we often napped on the canvas lounges, took tea, or finished reading the Times. Doves often took refuge there as well, as witnessed by occasional calling cards left behind. There they kept vigil over the garden and the reflecting pool with its lion fountain heads and sconces emitting water from the terra cotta colored wall that compensated for the change in elevation. Behind the pool was dense Mediterranean foliage and citrus. The water on a still day sent concentric ripples across a pale peacock blue surface that in appearance gave off a kind of moiré effect.

Had our friend seen his reflection in the water and become confused? Why had we arbitrarily assigned the male gender to him anyway? Was it his markings? Doves--except when mating--are almost indistinguishable from afar, and we couldn't decide on this fellow, despite his close proximity. Or did we just assume that a female would not be so foolish as to fly into a closed window?

“He probably needs water,” Sandra declared.

“I'll check the bird bath.”

From the dining room, I could see it was half empty, and while suitable for thrushes and towhees, not so for Mr. Dove.

“I'll put some water in it.”

“You won't frighten him.”

The sound of the door opening was enough to send him flying to roof of the neighboring villa. Our hearts were lifted, because that was considerable distance and not a clear flight path.

“The hawks won't get him, will they? There are hawks circling over there. “

“Yes”, I said, not sure if I was acknowledging the presence of the hawks or his possible demise.

“Hopefully the camouflage will protect him-- his coloring on a brown tile roof and his uncharacteristic silent flight”, I declared.

I knew otherwise. I had watched birds of prey fillet a dove, like a master chef plucking and prepping a squab. Nothing left but a pile of feathers and bones. At least the roof would provide some temporary shelter and a vantage point--but not for long. The next time we looked he was

gone. Perhaps to the other side of the roof or perhaps to the dry garden below. Hopefully there he would find shelter for the night and water from a leaky spigot.

The evening offered little cooling, and we quickly forgot our friend. Our dinner guests, Kate, Matthew and Sophie were driving up for dinner. A pleasant evening ensued. We munched on cheese and olives, drank wonderful wine and enjoyed Chicken Marsala with risotto and fresh garden vegetables. Matt and Sophie, left fairly early, Kate was staying over, and we all retired at a reasonable hour. The next morning, Kate and I sat on the terrace with a large carafe of strong coffee and a plate of cheese Danishes. The water gurgled in the pool and due to the lack of wind, formed perfect concentric circles across the placid surface.

I had forgotten about our friend and the events of yesterday, when I heard a low mournful sound, the sound of a dove, not the reassuring comforting call, nor a mating coo: this was an octave lower, and a strange feeling came over me.

Looking up at the window – there on the rain-streaked glass from a long forgotten storm – was the negative image of a dove caught in flight, the two wings arched, the head, a tiny feather, the body – as if a photographer had left a negative on a tray and not made a print.

Just then that low mournful call repeated. Was someone calling, a lost lover, a child, a friend, a relation; or just saying “Good Mourning, Miss Dove?”