

## PIGEONS AT THE BACKYARD-A SHORT STORY

Prathap Kamath  
Associate Professor of English  
Sree Narayana College, Kollam 691001  
Kerala, India.  
skprathap@gmail.com

Yasoda knew when they'd come. The restive flutter of their wings could be heard cutting through the drone of the motors on the road skirting the house, and the treble of the black and white film songs from the 50s and 60s on the television. The pigeons were punctual like soldiers. They would announce their arrival at the backyard with their guttural cooing. They would tap on the cemented floor prancing about on their rosy feet with claws shaped as commas.

She gave them raw rice, the best quality. They were pigeons of an elite taste. They wouldn't eat the ration rice she got from the public distribution depot, which was low quality as everyone knows. They would touch the ration rice with the tip of their beaks and turn away in disgust. Yasoda gave them the best quality rice she bought at a high price to feed the pigeon couple, the white and the blue ones.

"Here, eat it. This is the best you'll get wherever you go. And who is going to give it to you for free every day. Eat it while I am here giving it to you." They ate only rice. Not even wheat of the best order.

The milk-white pigeon was friendlier. It ate from her hand. It is the he, Yasoda decided. The blue one was shy and timid. It kept her at arm's length nervously jumping back whenever she stretched her hand. It is she, Yasoda smiled at her thought. It could be otherwise also, she mused. Why not?

The pigeons came at 11 in the mornings and 5 in the evenings. How do they keep their time? You can't be more punctual with a Swiss watch on your wrist and with a will to be punctual like these pigeons.

She wanted to see what they would do if she was absent when they came. She didn't appear one day. She watched them through the window without opening the door to the backyard. The white one circled cooing furiously around the blue one, while the blue one trotted in anxiety. The whitey climbed the windowsill of her kitchen and peeped in through the bars. Bluey the shy still cried in anguish, walking helter-skelter on the ground all the while. Yasoda came out of her hiding before they quit. How could she lose them? Her only company? She came out and fed them a liberal handful. She put the rice in a plastic bowl and set in on the floor. Whitey and bluey gathered eagerly around the bowl and pecked rhythmically at the morsel making a sound like rain drops falling on a tin roof.

She adopted them as her children and made it known to them. "I shall will you a handful of rice every morning and evening even after my death. I'll put it down in my will."

They liked what she said for they raised their heads from the food and regarded her with their bead-like eyes with a stillness that bespoke contemplation.

"Come with us for a ride to the sky," invited whitey. Bluey smiled with her eyes dilating into black grapes. She stood closer to whitey touching him as though to say she seconded him.

"I should ask my children, my son and daughter."

"For permission?"

"Yes."

"Do you think they will allow you?"

“No.”

“Has anyone given you permission to do what you liked?” the question came from bluey. Yasoda was astonished.

“Come with us. It is to take you with us to the skies that we came here all these days to eat and make our wings strong.”

“The rice you gave us has made us strong-winged,” endorsed the blue coy mistress.

“I have to think . . .”

“Too much of thinking is the bane of humans. We don’t think. We do.”

“What have you got thinking the pros and cons of things before you acted? You only thought to justify the cancellation of your desires.”

“Are you pigeons or fairies?”

“Simple pigeons come to take you with us.”

“Why me?”

“Because you fed us for a year at the exact hour everyday as though you had nothing else to do.”

“Oh, is that a big issue?”

“Yes.”

Yasoda was left in doubt still. The pigeons persisted.

“Imagine the flow, speed and view of flying. The buoyancy of air on your breast, the heads of the tallest trees under you and the sea like a green endless carpet spread to welcome your landing. Or the cliffs of mountains inviting you to alight on their rocky greenery.”

Yadoda fell for the whitey’s poetry.

But she yet hesitated. Then bluey struck the final blow.

“This will be our last visit. From tomorrow on we shall not be coming to this backyard.”

That got her.

She had no preparations to make. She didn’t even lock the house. She got out into the backyard dressed still in her housecoat.

The pigeons stood on her either side. Then they grew into massive birds. She was swept off her feet cosily resting on whitey’s back. Excitement shook her as she watched the terrace of her house shrink as she rose higher and higher. Then as whitey had promised he flew her over the sea and the mountain tops. But Yasoda willed to be lost forever in the white clouds. The pigeons read her mind and took her where she wanted to be.

It was at the weekend, four days later that Yasoda’s son came to see his mother and found that she was missing.

The police showed him a report they had received from fishermen at sea who had spotted a housecoat clad old woman of about 80 riding a giant white pigeon close to the surface of the sea, accompanied by a blue pigeon.

“Oh I see. When was this?”

“Last Wednesday.”

The son thanked the police and began to leave.

“Aren’t you registering a complaint?”

“No,” said Yasoda’s son and left.