

The Fledgling

By Brenda Rees



"Did you remain calm and still?" "Yes." "Very good. Cats bothering you?" "What's a cat?" "You'll know it when it rips you apart."

This exchange happened like clockwork for a few days.

One day, however, I noticed "Fledgy," was up on the concrete wall. This 8-foot-tall concrete barrier was used regularly by scampering squirrels and ... (shudder) cats. Low-hanging tree limbs dangled above the wall which could provide a quick escape flight. I was impressed Fledgy was able to rise to occasion. At least now off the ground, there was a flying chance to stay alive.

Again, Mama BT repeated her evening feedings and wall time. In just a matter of days, Fledgy was noticeable bigger with adult feathers poking through; its neck extending longer and sleeker.

*Fledgling Band-Tailed Pigeon | Photo Courtesy of:
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The grayish brownish thing I discovered underneath the salvia in the backyard garden made me hold my breath for weeks.

I discovered this hidden thing about four years ago around the end of April. A jerky movement at the top terrace caught my eye. Squatting down sumo-style, I gingerly lifted the leaves. All right, what are you? I was face-to-beak with a baby bird. The bird froze and I immediately let go of the leaves.

Oh great. Just great.

I knew the drill. Since this was a fledgling, I would leave it to see if mama came to tend to it. But my worry was cats. Strays and neighbor's cats often wandered through our Eagle Rock backyard. Could this fluffy fledge survive? Could I survive? And just what kind of fledging is this?

That answer came to me that dusk when mama arrived, first landing on the wires above. A band-tailed pigeon, she bobbed her head left and right, scoping out the territory. Down she swooped. She regurgitated god-only-knows-what to her baby that hungrily accepted the meal. Après dinner, the pair sat side-by-side for a spell. One could imagine the conversation: *"Any trouble?" "Well, the big human looked at me."*

The morning I went to bring in the laundry – which stayed on the line overnight because I was lazy – my heart dropped. Fledgy was not on the wall. I looked at all the possible points it could have flown to. Nothing. Internal tears. Oh well. It was nice viewing while it lasted. Can't control these things.

I was unclipping the shirts...and what? What??? Here was Fledgy calmly squeezed into a pair of underwear. I backed away not wanting to startle the now-big bird with a silent gaze. The laundry was going to stay on the line for a few MORE days.

And yes, Mama BT perched on the clothesline for evening meals. White bird poop splattered on not just underwear but on nearby laundry items.

After a few days, we realized Mama BT wasn't coming every night. A sign? Sure enough, one day Fledgy was out of his makeshift nest. Up high in our neighbor's oak tree, we saw two-band tailed figures on a branch. *"You made it." "Yes." "Well done. There's a big bunch of your relatives that hang out on wires down that way. It's a good time. Follow me!"*

With that sighting, I emotionally and physically exhaled – and I could finally bring in the laundry. 🐦