

## Angela

Peck, peck, rest. Peck, peck, peck I am exhausted. Let me out of here. Peck, peck and crack. I can begin to see a chink of light through the blue haze. Take a breather and peck again. My head is almost out but so heavy. More pecking and ungainly help with my wings and I make the final assault on my shell. I am out and laid out in a heap, panting, wet and not at all a pretty sight - I am borne! The world is very bright and breezy but feels firm. My immediate surroundings consist of a few carefully placed twigs, bits of newsprint, coloured straws, feathers. Lying beside my broken shell is another light blue egg rocking back and forth. Then there is a sudden shadow and flapping of wings. A head tilts in my direction and a ringed eye looks at me with concern. Then the thing settles on top of me and the egg. It's my Mother. I fall asleep and when wake up another creature quite like me has arrived. I have a brother. Alas no sign of a father, it looks I have been borne into a single parent family but we shall manage!

Now that I have sorted out the family part of my life I can investigate where my nest is built. It is not the way I imagined a tree would look like. The branches and tree trunk seem to be in the same round, thin material supporting flat planks. The leaves come in a green curtain. It is very satisfactory - but a touch unromantic for one's birthplace. In the meantime Mother is busy making frequent round trips bringing all manner of seeds, which she carefully drops into our gaping beaks. Every now and then she squirts in a drop of water. My feathers, such as they are, have dried out and my head does not feel so heavy any more. The light fades and Mother settles on top us. It is wonderful being under her warm body, her heart beats right through me, I feel safe and full.

On the third day she starts to talk to us. Being pigeons it is a short life so we arrive fully able to converse. "You - Mother starts - my first borne will be called Angela and your brother will be Nigel. The names of pigeons must share at least three letters with their zoological name!"

"In that case - butted in Nigel - I would prefer Gideon"

'Gideon the Pigeon' - sounds awful"

"What happened to Father - I inquired - why are you having to manage on your own.

In fact do we share the same Father?"

"Well - Mother went on sheepishly - male pigeons are very direct.

I met him by chance on the tarmac by the fountain. Its a good place for a quick feed as there is always an ample supply of seeds, bread crumbs and even the occasional McDonald. To cut a short story shorter I was pecking away when your Father appeared beside me doing his impersonation of a nodding haggis as male pigeons tend to do. He had clean feathers but as usual, I ignored such advances but lost concentration having just spotted a dandelion seed, which you will learn, is the crème de la crème for pigeons. Before I could take evasive action he landed on top of me and I slipped to the ground. To tell you frankly it did not feel too bad and thought I might as well get it over with. It was over in a flash and he just moved on..... Haven't seen him since and yes he was father to you both."

We were very happy on our plank home. The first few days passed peacefully as we eagerly awaited Mother's return hour after hour. We kept our heads down but were all attention as she fed choice seeds down our beaks. Soon we grew yellow feathers and were a happy family. On the third day after our births humans arrived on our tree. Two men were carrying tools and blew smoke through their nostrils. Mother admitted that in her haste she built our nest not on a tree but on what she thought was an inaccessible ledge around a building. The view was good, easy to take off and there was ample shading from rain and sun. Whilst perching on our eggs she realized her mistake when some men turned up wearing uncomfortable plastic helmets. Not only was the ledge not inaccessible but it had ladders, handrails and even lights providing a safe way (for humans) to our home. The first visitors carried bits of paper and one of them, tall and grey, took a good look and made some notes then pointed a large glass eye in our direction. Click. At this stage the humans did not bother us and only showed mild curiosity. Mother did not take chances though, she was a brave Mother and stayed on our nest whenever anyone came near us. Curiously, the men took the windows out from the building then put them back again. This went on for weeks. Meanwhile we gained weight and Mother had to make more and more frequent trips to keep up with our growing appetite.

Then disaster struck on a Monday morning. Different, rougher looking men came who did not wear helmets and set about taking our tree down bit by bit. Our nest was shaking and soon the planks disappeared from above and the green curtain dropped away revealing a huge drop to the ground. We were exposed to sun and a fierce wind. Soon our nest would be thrown over and we would become just another statistic in infant pigeon mortality.

Mother perched nervously above us on one of the few remaining branches. Nigel got into a panic, I tried to calm him down but he would not stay put and clambered out of the nest to the very edge of the precipice. There was an almighty knock as one of the men dropped branches to the ground. "Nigel come back at once" I tried to chirp but it was too late, he went over the toe-board with his tiny wings flapping uselessly. Surely, I would be next unless a miracle happened. And it did in the shape of the Fairy Godmother! She appeared in the nearest window brilliantly dressed in magenta with matching magenta make up and magenta fingernails. She waved her magic wand but instead of touching things she talked to it. The effect was wondrous to behold. The rough men appeared and as she spoke to them they froze into visible panic. Without a word they made down the ladders and the Fairy Godmother followed them. Now that the immediate danger passed Mother took off on a dive to see what had happened below. One of the man was holding the poor lifeless body of my brother Nigel whilst the Fairy Godmother was talking to him and the magic wand at the same time. There was nothing to be done for Nigel except a decent funeral in a shoebox. The men dropped their helmets and quickly drove off in their tattered van.

We were left in peace again but in less comfort having no overhead protection and were now a smaller family. Frankly, Mother hardly had to do any energy sapping flights for food as birdseed appeared every morning by the window. I was growing rapidly, in fact got too fat for the size of my wings which I would flap now and then to gain strength. My feathers were beginning to turn an untidy grey. Soon I would be ready to leave the nest.

Our regained quiet life came to another abrupt halt. The same men appeared again, the same shaking of branches and the removal of planks. It was time for do or die. Mother perched next to me as I flapped my wings and balanced myself on top of the toe-board looking over the avenue of trees below. There was another jerk and I let go stretching out my wings. I did not fall, I could fly and was free. Mother and I made a

short circle and landed on a branch of what was left of our old home.  
My heart pumped in my throat but I wanted to carry on. Next we flew over the whole building then flew a figure eight over the north side tipping our wings as we passed. The Fairy Godmother was there waving us on. Thank you Thank you.  
A thermal lifted us and we took off for the open. As we flew through the cool fresh air we saw green, yellow and blue fields, busy cows and fluffy sheep. An express train cut through one way and cars another. I turned my head but Mother was no longer beside me. I was free, lonely and ready.



July 1994  
to Julika and Jacqui (magenta Lunn)