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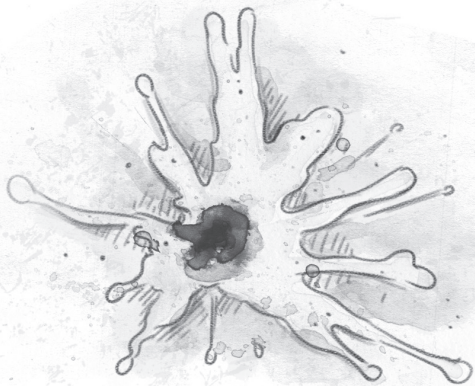
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To NN, CC and FMB, with love – HM

To funniest sister-in-law, Özlem – AT



The Plop Squad

On a sunny day in a quiet street, in the branches of a large, leafy tree, a flock of pigeons passed the time, cooing and chatting about their day.

‘Car!’

With the low purr of an engine, a sleek black vehicle pulled in under their tree.

‘Wait for it, wait for it ...’ said one pigeon. The driver’s door opened and a man in a dark suit stepped out. ‘Release!’



A large pigeon dropped a white poo
onto the man's shoulder.

A low murmur of appreciation spread
through the flock. 'Good one, Doug!' said
one. 'Next time aim for the head.'

The pigeon's victim looked at his
shoulder, horrified, then up at the tree.
The birds all looked away, pretending
they weren't watching every move.



The man leaned back into his car for some tissues. He looked up at the tree again before wiping his shoulder. Disgusted, he threw the tissues back in the car and walked away angrily.

The birds flapped around, arranging themselves in branches above the car.

‘Fire!’ A rain of squirts plopped onto the black paint.

‘Go for the windscreen!’

Immediately a series of plops landed on the glass.

‘That’s all from me,’ said Doug. ‘I’m empty.’

He flew off to look for food. The park looked empty and quiet today.

He landed in a leafy tree over a bench.

The freshly cleaned bench didn't look like a bird target—but it was. It was a favourite of the Plop Squad, as the pigeons called themselves.

From nearby a young pigeon called Justin watched keenly. He wanted to join the squad, and had studied them from a distance.

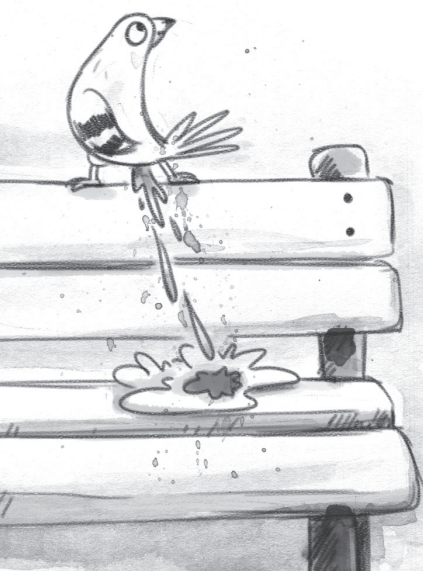
He wanted to be a part of it, badly.

Justin flew to a branch near the larger pigeon.

'Hi,' he called.

Doug ignored him.

The younger bird hopped closer. 'So, umm ... How's the Plop Squad going?'



He let loose a neat white plop, right on the seat of the bench, not too far to the right, not too far to the left.

‘I’m Justin, by the way.’

Doug pretended not to hear, but looked down at the white splat in the prime sitting region of the seat. Not bad.

‘Plop Squad’s fine,’ he eventually said. ‘We’re full. If you’re thinking of trying to join.’

Justin’s wings drooped. It had become his dream to join the crack squadron, and be part of a team with a purpose. He’d been working on his aim for a long time, and he was sure he was good enough.

‘So ... you’re not thinking of growing?’ he asked. ‘More members?’

He hopped along the branch and released a squirt onto the very edge of the park bench. Doug watched where it landed, but then looked off to the distance. 'Nope. No more.'

'But if you had more members, you could take on bigger targets,' persisted Justin. 'Trucks? Cafés? School yards?'

He fluttered back further along the branch. Another perfect splat hit the other end of the bench, exactly in line with his other two.

Now Doug was interested. Three plops within minutes was a good rate, and his aim was sharp. The kid had promise.

'Supermarket carpark, this time tomorrow,' he said. 'In the tree above the