

AGAINST MEMOIR

COMPLAINTS, CONFESSIONS & CRITICISMS

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PIGEON MANIFESTO

The revolution will not begin in your backyard because you do not have a backyard. What you have is a back door that shits you directly onto the streets of your city, what you have is a back staircase of wood that resembles splintered matchsticks, it trembles each time a bus rolls down Mission. What you have is a patch of concrete, a splotch of weedy grass clumped with trash. This is not a backyard. What you have is a cement slab that pools with rainwater, that catches the tumble of a beer can and a sludgy condom that fall from the apartments above you. What you have is empty of anything green, but the slugs still find a way to work it out, inkiest green like mold breathed to life, they slide a wet trail across what is not a backyard. Maybe you have never had, will never have, a backyard, but you still could have slugs and always you will have the pigeons.

The revolution will begin at your curb, in the shallow pool of shade that is your gutter. The revolution will begin with the pigeon bobbing, hungry, in the street, it is now your job to love her. It is now your job to not avert your eyes from her feet, your job to seek out and find the one pigeon foot that is blobbed in a chemical melt, a pink-orange glob, a wad of bubblegum. The pigeon splashed in

a pool of chemicals laid out to kill it because so many of the people hate pigeons. This is now why you must love them. We must love the nature that does not make it onto the Discovery Channel, on Animal Planet, we must love the nature that crawls up to our doorstep like spare-changers and scares us with the thickness of its feathers, its mutant feet, and orange eyes. Someone could have made dinner with the rice on the corner but instead they sprinkled it on the curb with the hope that hungry pigeons would eat it, and that the grain would expand in their stomachs, tearing them open, felling them in the street, plump and feathered and dead in the gutter. I think perhaps this does not even work, because I watch the pigeons peck at the rice and fly off on gray wings. I hardly ever see them dead in spite of how many people try to kill them.

Pigeons are doves. They are rock doves, and I wonder if we began to call them that if people would hesitate to hate them, as doves have that history as messengers of peace. It is true that in my neighborhood nobody hates the mourning doves, dusky and elegant with wings that squeak as if they flap on rusty hinges. They roost on the wires like little Audrey Hepburns, while the pigeons troll the ground, tough and fat, some of them look like they should be smoking cigarettes. They look poor and banged up, like they could kick the mourning doves' asses but are wise to the divide-and-conquer tactics we use on one another, so they coo wearily at the mourning doves and waddle forth in search of scavenged delights. What you may not know is when you call a pigeon "a rat with wings" you have given it a compliment. The only thing a rat lacks is a pair of wings to lift it, so you have named the pigeon

Pigeon Manifesto

perfectly. When you say to me, “I hate pigeons,” I want to ask you who else you hate. It makes me suspicious. I once met a girl who was so proud to have hit such a bird on her bicycle, I swear, I thought that it was me she hit. I felt her handlebars in my stomach and now it is your job to feel it also. The pigeons are birds, they are doves. They are the nature of the city and the ones who no one loves. When people say they hate pigeons, I want to ask them if they hate themselves, too. Does it prick the well of your loathing? Do they make you feel dirty and ashamed? Are you embarrassed about how little or how much you have, for how you have had to hustle? Being dirty is not a problem for the pigeon. You can ask it, “How do you feel about having the city coating your feathers, having the streets gunked up in the crease of your eye?” and the pigeon will say, “Not a problem.” You will now stop blaming the pigeon. It is not the pigeon’s fault. The pigeon was once a dove, and then we built our filthy empire up around it, came to hate it for simply thriving in the midst of our decay, came to hate it for not dying. The pigeon is your ally. They are chameleons, gray as the concrete they troll for scraps, at night they huddle and sing like cats. Their necks are glistening, iridescent as an oil-slick rainbow, they mate for life, and they fly.

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