

*No. 11*

*The Tale of Three*

*Little Pigeons*

By Carina O'Reilly

Once upon a time there were three little pigeons who lived together in the roof of an underground station in central London. One day, their mother pigeon said the chick benefit had run out, and it was time for them to leave and seek their own fortune.

The first little pigeon was a lazy pigeon. She didn't want to travel far from home, and got as far as a pile of Evening Standards near a mound of rubbish. There were old bits of food there, and empty coffee cups, and some polystyrene. "That'll do me," thought the first little pigeon. She thought of asking the newspaper seller to give her some newspapers, but then noticed that people were dropping them on the ground anyway. "Gravy," she thought to herself, puffing her chest and preening.

The first little pigeon built herself a nest in a secluded corner of the entrance to the underground station, behind a CCTV camera. She settled herself with a corner of the paper and looked up to see if her brother and sister had been kicked out yet.

Soon enough, out they came. The first thing they did was circle around to see if they could see the first little pigeon, who came out and strutted around a bit.

"Come and look at my nest!" she said, and down they came.

“It's not very sturdy,” said the third little pigeon, doubtfully.

“And it smells of kebab,” said the second.

“You're just jealous because I've finished building my house and you haven't even started yours,” said the first little pigeon, and ruffled her feathers. She turned her back on the others and settled down on a scrap of napkin.

“Well,” said the second little pigeon. “I'm going to build a better house than that.”

“Coo,” agreed the third little pigeon, and they left.

The second little pigeon had seen trees across the road. “That's what's wrong with the world,” he thought to himself. “Pigeons have got too distant from nature. I'm going back to the trees, where pigeons should be,” he decided with conviction.

He crossed the road along with hundreds of moving feet, and waddled to the foot of a huge tree. “That'll do me,” he thought. He searched around until he found enough sticks and old leaves that he thought nobody would miss too much, and built himself a nest in a secluded corner of the tree.

The third pigeon fluttered across the road to have a look. “It doesn’t look very stable,” she said, doubtfully.

“You’re just jealous,” said the second little pigeon, “because I’ve returned to nature, and you haven’t even started building your house yet.” And he turned his back on his sister and nestled down on a pile of rather elderly leaves. “Ah,” he sighed. “Peace.”

Now the third little pigeon had spent quite a lot of time sheltering under the eaves of the local public library, and was quite a clever little pigeon as a result. “We’re not wood pigeons,” thought the third little pigeon. “We don’t know anything about building nests in trees. We’re city pigeons. And our great-great grandparents were rock pigeons, who lived in cliffs. I’m going to build my home somewhere in the city that looks like a cliff.” And the third little pigeon looked up at the building across the road, that she had seen every day from her mother’s nest. And she looked up, and up, and up.

“That building is as tall as a cliff and very safe,” thought the third little pigeon, and flew right to the top of it to look for a corner under the roof to build her nest.

Meanwhile, night was falling, and a big bad cat woke up and started to feel a bit peckish. He strolled along the darkening pavements and

looked up to the roof of the underground station where he knew there was a pigeons' nest.

“Quiet,” he thought. “Strange.”

Then, to his surprise, he saw a rustling in a corner of the entrance to the underground station. “Rat?” he wondered, as a small landslide of old napkins was dislodged. But then up popped the head of the first little pigeon, who looked about her with pride.

“Oh pigeon!” called the cat. “Can you see me?”

The first little pigeon gave a start. She knew about cats but had never seen one up quite so close. How glossy he looked, and how hungry...

“Let me in, little pigeon, let me in,” said the cat. “Orrr I will huff and I will puff and I will blow your nest down.”

“Not by the feathers on my upper left wing!” said the first little pigeon.

“I will not let you in!”

So the cat huffed, and it puffed, and then it thought: “Sod this for a lark,” and pounced on the nest of the first little pigeon.

“Cool!” said the first little pigeon, and some other things besides. She flew up as high as she could in fright, and flapped across to her brother’s nest in the tree across the road.

“Darnation,” thought the cat, spitting out a stray tail feather. Then he spotted a piece of old kebab. “Mmm,” he said, settling down to eat. “Gravy.”

“Oh! You won’t believe what happened to me!” said the first little pigeon to the second little pigeon. “A cat leapt on me and destroyed my nest!”

“Come in,” said the second little pigeon. “Quickly. You’ll be safe up here. Your home wasn’t very sturdy,” he added. “And it smelled of kebab,” he thought, but he didn’t say that out loud.

“This house is built of sticks and leaves like a nest should be. No cat will get in here,” he said. And the two little pigeons settled down on some rather crunchy brown leaves while the first little pigeon shivered at her narrow escape.

“Oh little pigeons!” called the cat. “Can you see me?”

The pigeons started, and looked all around below them. They couldn’t see the cat anywhere.

“Up here,” said the cat, and grinned from the branch above.

“I forgot they climb trees,” said the second little pigeon, who had never seen a cat up close before. “All I can see is teeth!” he thought.

“Let me in, little pigeon, let me in,” said the cat. “Orrr I will huff and I will puff and I will blow your nest down.”

“Not by the feathers on my upper left wing!” said the second little pigeon. “I will not let you in!”

So the cat huffed, and it sighed, and thought: “Not all this again,” and dived down on the nest of the second little pigeon.

“Coo!” said the second little pigeon in fright. “Coo!” agreed the first, and they flew as high as they could away from the cat and flapped across the road to the third little pigeon’s nest high up in the very tall building.

“Darnation,” thought the cat, spitting out another tail feather, and watched the second little pigeon’s nest fall to bits around him.

“Mmm,” he said, settling down for a good scratch. “Pieces.”

“Oh!” said the two little pigeons to their elder sister. “You won’t believe what happened to us! A cat leapt on us and destroyed our nests!”

“Come in,” said the third little pigeon. “Quickly. You’ll be safe up here. Your home wasn’t very sturdy,” she said to the first little pigeon.

“And it did smell of kebab,” said the second little pigeon.

“Oh, shut up,” said the first little pigeon. “Yours wasn’t any good either. It fell to pieces.” The second little pigeon scowled.

“It wasn’t very stable,” agreed the third little pigeon. “Show-off,” thought the second little pigeon, but he didn’t say that out loud.

“Oh little pigeons!” called the cat. “Can you see me?”

“No,” called the third little pigeon. “Where are you?”

“Bugger,” thought the cat, who was sitting on the pavement at the bottom of the very tall building. “Ah,” he thought, “there must be a fire escape!” He prowled round to the back of the building, and there it was: a metal staircase that went up, and up, and up.

After some time had passed, the three little pigeons heard the cat calling again, a little closer.

“Oh little pigeons!” called the cat. “Can you see me?”

“Nope,” said the third little pigeon, “Still nothing. Where are you?”

“Bugger,” thought the cat, who was only halfway up the fire escape and was starting to think that a kebab would have been much easier to catch.

After some time had passed, the three little pigeons heard the cat calling again, a little closer again.

“Oh little pigeons!” called the cat. “Can you see me?”

“Coo,” said the third little pigeon, “There you are. You look knackered.”

The cat suddenly felt hungry again. “Let me in, little pigeon, let me in,” said the cat. “Orrr I will huff and I will puff and I will blow your nest down.”

“Not by the feathers on my upper left wing!” said the third little pigeon. “I will not let you in!”

So the cat huffed, and it puffed, and it huffed, and it puffed, and it still couldn't catch its breath so it sat for a while and cleaned its paw. Then it remembered what it was doing and leapt towards the nest of the third little pigeon, and landed in the drainpipe.

"Cool!" said the first little pigeon. "He looks funny!"

"Oh, shut up," thought the cat, and tried to look elegant as he twisted out of the drainpipe and slunk along the gutter.

Now, the cat had also spent a lot of time near books, and he knew how this sort of thing was supposed to go. If you couldn't catch your pigeon with strength, you were meant to trick them out. So he searched his sharp little cat mind for stories he remembered from the books he had heard being read out loud.

"Oh little pigeons!" called the cat. "I know where there is a field full of turnips!"

"What's a turnip?" asked the first little pigeon.

"Darnation," thought the cat. He tried again.

"Oh little pigeons!" called the cat. "I know where there is a lovely apple tree!"

“What’s an apple tree?” asked the second little pigeon, who wasn’t all that close to nature after all.

“Darnation,” thought the cat. He tried one last time.

“Oh little pigeons!” called the cat. “I know where there is a fish and chip shop about to close! They’ll throw away all their scraps!”

“Cool!” said the third little pigeon excitedly. “You go first and show us the way!”

So the cat climbed all the way down the fire escape that went down, and down, and down, and went to the fish and chip shop, and it was only then that he noticed that the pigeons hadn’t followed him at all. The third little pigeon had already been to the pavement outside the fish and chip shop and taken home plenty of scraps of fish and chips to eat. So much, in fact, that there was hardly anything left for the cat. The cat was cross, and thought of going back and eating the three little pigeons instead, but then he thought of the fire escape that went up, and up, and up, and he just couldn’t be bothered. “I never liked the taste of pigeon anyway,” he told himself and prowled away with his tail held aloft.

High up in the very tall building, the third little pigeon spread out their feast. "Safe!" cooed the pigeons.

"Kebab," thought the cat.

*The End*