

DON Q FALLS IN LOVE.

by

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Photographs by William L. Finley, Jr.

Don Q looked down the hillside where the maples, alders, and hazels were fluffed out in soft green scanty clothing, on out over the winding Willamette Valley. He was in Oregon, and it was May time. And he was one year old this month of May. Don't ask his exact birthday. Like his namesake of old, Cervantes' famous hero, the pet valley quail was forever "riding gloriously at windmills." He, too, was possessed with a marvelous madness, or perhaps it was a great love, and one would never guess the objects of this gallant obsession. Shoes-- yes, shoes!

Don had spent the whole of his one year with his human family, not in captivity, for he could fly from the roses to the river, or watch the robins on the lawn, or send his clarion call out into the silence and the sunshine. His feeling for people was a thing to wonder at. Of course, he was attached to the members of his own household who fed him and played with him every day. For folks were quail, very companionable quail; or a quail was a person. But that wasn't his limit. He liked people wherever he met them, and the more there were about him, the better pleased he was. To walk around among a number of shuffling shoes raised his exuberance to a pitch of excitement. To be left alone raised his fear almost to the same pitch of excitement. But he saw to it that he was seldom left alone. His boy friend often took him for a walk about the grounds, following the paths through the shrubbery. Don pattered along at his heels with his neck stretched as eager as a pet terrier. And returning, he slid

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front door about an inch behind his guide. No thrilling bird notes, no green thickets nor bending river bank could lure him from his love of human beings.

In truth, his daily life and habits in this human home had ^{almost} lost for him any feeling or understanding of his own kind. A young Chinese pheasant chick was brought in and put down beside Don Q. The homeless little ball of down looked not unlike Don Q himself when a few months earlier, he had been deserted by his own wild mother. Would the quail feel a brotherly bond for this little fellow, and eventually take him under his wing and cuddle him in the cold of the night? He paid no attention to the stranger. He didn't see him at all. Soon a plaintive, frail note sounded and the little pheasant scurried for a hiding place. The effect on Don Q was instant. He dashed frantically this way and that as if pursued by a deadly enemy. How could that mere movement and the flutter of those stubby wings instill such fear in the quail's heart? There being nothing handy to hide under, he finally stopped and gave the inoffensive

pheasant a lowering, suspicious look. Then he sidled around him at ~~quite~~ a safe distance for a good inspection, as if he was someone to be watched carefully. Alas for the little waif's chances of a warm wing for the night. To Don Q, birds of any kind were foreign folks. He didn't recognize them at all. Or perhaps in his own mind he had become a human being because of association. Anyway, he was a queer bird.

This was proved more than once. Don Q was sauntering about the lawn jerkily nipping off snips of grass and eating them. He was apparently blind to the freshness of the morning, the shimmering green of the leaves, the splashes of sunlight on the river's surface. Yet all around him the other birds were chanting their enjoyment of the good out-of-doors. Down the hill in a thicket, a chat was warbling an irrepressible medley of mimicries of all the bird neighbors he knew. From the same grove came the droning ecstasy of a ~~mourning dove~~ *wild pigeon*. And listen to the clear call of a quail from under the bank-- and an answer across the river! No notice from Don Q; only the busy snip, snip of grass blades. How could he stand there and not tingle to that vibrating entreaty to come away to the dim woods where the quail folks were making the silence musical with their merry mutterings? A queer bird, indeed!

But he wasn't deaf and dumb to everything around him. Two members of the family came out of the door, and something was going on. Don Q felt it and began to step about in anticipation. Preparations were on foot. His little travelling box

was brought out and soon he was motoring along over the country road. After the car stopped and he could see where he was, he found himself in a sunny room of a red brick schoolhouse. He stepped out onto a little table, and in front of him were many faces of children, and below them feet-- more feet than he had ever dreamed of! There were a hundred and fifty pairs of shoes down there on the floor. Don Q couldn't resist them. Spreading his wings, he sailed down to the front row. "Jab! Jab!" he went at a pair of toes, and the next ones were so close that he attended to them at the same time, and two more, and two more, as far as he looked down the line. Under the chairs he spied a forest of feet. Don Q's fighting blood was up. He jerked his head back and stiffened his crest as he uttered his ringing challenge. Then he took on the whole roomful of shoes, pecking hurriedly one toe after another, while the faces above him were convulsed with surprise and laughter.

"Children! Children!" warned the teacher, "Don't get excited and scare the little bird!" For a minute the merriment was bottled, but it bubbled over and burst out in gurgles here and there. The small bodies squirmed, fresh frocks were crumpled, and eyes shone like stars.

"Please," said a little boy, stepping forward, "The windows are open. He might get away." He was assured that Don Q would rather play with girls and boys in a schoolroom than fly out into the woods. The room was still while the story of the quail's life was told the children. Then in the midst of the smiling faces a hand waved impatiently.

"We remember that little quail! A neighbor lady asked Barbara and me to help find him. He fell over a bump in the old road up the hill here, and his mother got scared and went off and left him, and that was a long time ago- and - " The little boy's face was red and his eyes were round. He became sheepish at his explosion and subsided into a corner. His sister then related the very first chapter of Don Q's life, which not even his best friend had known before. Don Q had come back to his birthplace.

Then Don Q led the children out onto the lawn where they could play and have their picture taken. They still watched him anxiously and formed a circle around him for fear he would get away. It was pleasanter and cooler on the grass, so he frisked and dodged about among the shrubs with the children scampering after him. One chubby-faced little girl held a big rag-doll hugged to her stomach like a padded shield. Don Q curved up like a little airplane and landed on her head. Startled, she settled down in a heap on the grass, but the bird clung to her hair and balanced himself to her bendings. Her eyes rounded.

"Marjorie's going to cry! Put him on my head!" shouted one to whom the honor appealed.

"No!" put in another. "Put him on Frank's head! Tomorrow's his birthday!"

At the sound of the noon bell Don Q took his departure down the road, much to the disappointment of the children in front of the schoolhouse who wanted him to stay and play some more. He had another call to pay, and this time to a very different

place than a schoolroom. Into the entrance of a city building he was carried where people were standing about waiting for the elevator. The quail was wrapped up in his little box, and became impatient.

"Take-care-there! Take-care-there!" the ringing tones echoed in the busy building. Astonished eyes were fixed on the parcel in the boy's hands, His face went crimson.

"If you do that again, I'm going to drop you hard," he grumbled at the paper package. They got out at the eighth floor. Don Q was accustomed to many man-made things, but elevators were new to him. He preferred to rise on his own whistling wings.

"Take-care-there! Take-care-there!" again he warned the riders. This time there was a comprehending grin on the faces about.

"Is Ben Lampman in?" the boy asked of the girl at the desk. He was shown into a small office with several desks in it, much littered with newspapers.

"Don Q ~~is just back from the east and~~ has come to pay you a call," he announced to a man who was writing. The desk-chair whirled about, showing a pleased face. The little California quail stepped gingerly out of his box, gazing about on the strange surroundings, but when the newspaper man opened the door and walked out, he lifted his head and pattered along behind him down the aisle of the big room. The dignified City Editor adjusted his glasses for a second look. Then he leaned over to stare and smile. Was it a wild quail up here in a city sky-

scraper? Had the mountains and the woods invaded this big newspaper office?

Typewriters clicked on all sides. Reporters were hurried and harassed, oblivious that a rollicking spirit of the open fields had come to give them a minute's respite, to spread smiles of remembrance on their faces and good cheer in their work.

As usual, Don Q was soon rounding up boots and shoes in the room. Everywhere he went, he met a lot of new feet. In this adventure the most of them were men's shoes, and the majority tan ones. This was greatly to his liking. But he spied a pair of black ones off in the middle of the room. Two men at a desk were absorbed in conversation. The bird scurried under typewriters and chairs and between astonished legs, to finally pounce upon the pair of black shoes and give them a good drubbing just for being black. The two men leaned close together and talked busily. All at once a movement caught the eye of one of them. He looked down. The words on his tongue were cut short. His mouth hung open and he stared at the other man's shoes. His companion talked on until the silence struck him. Then he looked at his friend's fascinated face and following his glance, he dropped his eyes hurriedly over his clothes and on down to his feet. A cocky and prancing little pugalist was pecking and hammering the toes of his shiny oxfords, leaving dull marks and streaks on them.

"Where in thunder did you hail from!" he gasped. There was a roar from the crowd of on-lookers who had gathered

around to see the fun. For half an hour Don Q was the center of a reception as reminiscences of "that gamey little bird" were exchanged, taking the newspaper squad out into the misty morning fields where that high-hearted call, "Take-care-there!" will always be a cheerful greeting.

Always? It is to be hoped so, although the fields are becoming emptier of those ringing notes of goodfellowship. Who would take Don Q's life away for the mere joy of killing? He has forsaken his own kind for the friendship of man and as he goes his way he meets, not faces, but feet. These are his windmills and being little and lowly and far below the sphere of faces, but joyously confident of them, he finds great happiness in tilting with feet.

his first love,

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