

What the World Needs Now

What the world needs now is more ducks. Ducks might enlighten us, give us a new outlook, even a glimmer of hope.

Take the duck I spied in my Baltimore neighborhood. Walking beside a stream while wallowing in my woe-is-me widowhood, I looked up, and what did I see? A duck! In a tree! The nerve, I sniffed, apparently air and water to keep you aloft and afloat aren't enough for some ducks.

Well, actually, they're not, at least if you're a wood duck. Wood ducks are squatters, who make their homes in abandoned woodpecker holes. So the duck I saw was doing what came naturally, just hanging out on a limb.

The more I stared at her, the more I came to regard her as serendipity with feathers, one that gave me fresh perspective, made me think that maybe we all should go out on a limb.

Ducks, for example, don't let their crossed eyes and waddling gaits interfere with their love lives. With a friend from my bereavement group, I once took a trip through the American Southwest where she and I encountered high duck drama. On a clear lake high in Utah's La Sal Mountains a female swam, all coy-like, behind two drakes paddling shoulder to shoulder best-buddy style; one slightly larger, but the other slightly slyer. Feigning weariness, he'd lag behind his friend and, oh so subtly, insert himself between his pal and the female.

Then the bigger drake, realizing he'd been duped, would take off, zooming around the lake in a fury. And then the smaller drake would take off. And then the female—talk about your mallard madness. And just when their tortured tableaux was growing tiresome, they flew away. Maybe to a mountaintop *ménage à trios*? Why not? Life is fleeting. Ask any widow.

Late on a Friday afternoon, my friend and I flew back Baltimore to find that her battery was dead, so there we were, two tired widows with no way of getting home. But then the parking lot attendant came with jumper cables, and while he recharged the battery, I watched ducks.

A drainage ditch between the parking lot and a highway made a perfectly lovely home for two mallards, swimming in a nonchalant zigzag pattern. The more I watched, the more I admired how those two were utterly committed to zigging while on the zig. The same went for when they were on the zag.

They calmed me down. Put things in perspective: the battery would get fixed, I'd get home. Even might have time for a stroll along the stream before dark.

Who knows what I'd see? Maybe feathered serendipity sitting in a tree.

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