

A PALACE FOR PEEPER



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For
Morgan and Avery

A Palace for Peepers

Peepers was born in New York City. She was found by Dmitry, the porter in Astor Court, the building where Violet lived. Dmitry saw Peepers huddled near a large flowerpot in the building's garden. As Violet walked in Astor Court's front entrance, Dmitry placed the baby bird in her arms.



Peepers was a baby pigeon. Baby pigeons are called “squeakers” by wildlife rescuers. However, Peepers didn’t squeak. She peeped. That’s how Peepers got her name.

Peepers couldn’t have been more than three weeks old. Her pink chest was almost bare. The top of her head was white. The edges of her black wings were white. She had no tail, just a few wisps of feathers. She looked like a tiny bald eagle. She must have fallen out of her nest.

Dmitry knew Peepers was healthy because he had seen Peepers’s mother tending to her. The mama pigeon had tried to feed Peepers where she sat on the

ground. Violet and Dmitry wanted to put the baby back in her nest. They knew that's the right thing to do with a wild bird. But now, when they looked for Peepers's nest and mother, they couldn't find them. How could they leave Peepers? They had to help. Stray cats often wandered through the garden and would surely attack a baby bird.

And so Violet and Dmitry took over where nature let go.

Violet was only twelve years old. But it was summer, so she had lots of free time. She had learned in school that pigeons were highly intelligent. The teacher had shown a video where a pigeon was able

to tell the difference between a Picasso and a Monet painting. Certainly Peepers would be able to tell the difference between its own mother and Violet. Nevertheless, Violet would have to do. She would be Peepers's godmother.

Peepers sat real still in Violet's arms. Violet had never held a baby pigeon before. It seemed full of life but helpless and scared. Violet knew she had to care for it and make sure it had a chance to grow up.

Violet brought Peepers upstairs to her family's apartment. She settled her in an old gerbil cage by the bathroom window so Peepers could have a view of the garden

below. Then Violet called her mom's friend Rita. Rita was the director and co-founder of the Wild Bird Fund, where she nursed wild birds and animals back to health. Rita told Violet, "Get some Puppy Chow dry food. Soak it in boiling water, until it's soft. And feed Peepers this mixture three times a day."

Violet wrapped Peepers in an old undershirt to keep her steady and calm while trying to feed her. She tried and tried to pry open her beak to insert the puppy morsels. In spite of the undershirt, Peepers squirmed and squirmed, and she only swallowed a little food. Then, somehow, Violet stumbled on a

feeding technique that worked.

Violet put her hand in front of Peepers, fingers pointing downward. She put Peepers's beak between two of her fingers. It must have reminded Peepers of her mother's beak because she opened up wide. Now Violet could insert the puppy food.

Violet was vegan—she didn't eat meat or dairy foods—and didn't like the idea of feeding Puppy Chow to a baby bird. But Peepers loved it. She chowed it down, all right, especially when Violet lightly dipped the Puppy Chow mush in wild birdseed.

Eating became a happy event that they both looked forward to.

Violet didn't have to pry the baby's locked beak open anymore. Peepers's wings quivered in excitement after every beak full. Peepers ate so much that she seemed to grow bigger with each meal. She would take such large helpings that she would have to walk around in a circle and flap her wings so the food could travel down her long neck.

Two days and six feedings later, Violet and Peepers went to see Rita. Rita weighed Peepers and checked her for diseases. She opened Peepers's little beak and looked inside. It was pink as a whistle. She looked at some of Peepers's poo, through a microscope. Rita said

that Peepers was in tiptop condition. She would grow into a fine, adult pigeon.

“There might be one problem,” Rita told Violet. “You probably won’t be able to release her on the New York City streets when she is able to fly. Baby birds, just like children, need to learn the ropes from their parents. They need to be taught how to take care of themselves.”

Violet understood. Peepers would not know how to fend for herself in the big city. Violet would always have to feed her.

“There might be another way, however,” Rita said. “If you put her with older pigeons or pigeons

that are being cared for in a safe place, she might learn from them. If she's really lucky, Peepers could learn enough to be released successfully. She could be released with Squeaks."

Squeaks, another orphaned pigeon, was also Rita's patient. She was about the same age as Peepers. It would be ideal if Squeaks and Peepers were released together. A little pigeon alone would have no chance competing for food with big bully pigeons. Squeaks and Peepers, as a pair, could put up a better fight.

The more Violet got to know Peepers, the more she loved her.



When her tail feathers came in, she would spread them out like a fan and comb each feather from bottom to top. When Violet came into the room to feed her or just to say hello, Peepers danced in her cage and fluffed up her feathers. Peepers would sit in Violet's hand and peck at Violet's face, giving her kisses with her pink beak. But Peepers was a wild bird, and Violet knew she needed to be outdoors. Still, she wished she could keep her.

Violet and Peepers made a friend a couple of weeks later in the Wild Bird Fund waiting room. Her name was Nan. Peepers was there getting her weekly check-up. Nan

was there with a carrying case in her lap. Violet and Nan started talking, and Violet found out that Nan was the woman who had rescued Squeaks. Her carrying case held none other than Squeaks the pigeon! Nan was bringing him in for a check-up, too.

“May be Peepers and Squeaks could get together at my place. Nan said. “What do you think?”

That sounded great to Violet. She had a good feeling about Nan, who had the brightest smile. Peepers seemed to like her, too. She kept trying to peck at the big diamond ring that Nan wore. Nan didn't mind. Peepers must have thought it was sparkling puppy

morsels.

The phone rang the next day. Nan invited Peepers to come live with her. Peepers would be with Squeaks and other pigeons in a newly built outdoor birdhouse. Violet's heart pinched at the thought of Peepers living somewhere else. But she knew this was an invitation she couldn't refuse. It was best for Peepers.

"Where shall I bring her?" Violet asked.

"The Old Hooper Cooper Mansion!"

"We'll be there tomorrow with bells and whistles."

"Come at three."

During the school year, Violet

walked by the Old Hooper Cooper Mansion on her way to swimming class at the 92nd street Y every week. To think that it would soon be Peepers's home! Violet went to sleep that night dreaming of room after room of luxury—silks and satins; marble floors and stained glass windows; curlicue furniture; vases of blue, red, green, and yellow flowers filling rooms with sunshine and rainbows; and little Peepers in a golden cage, munching birdseed while watching colored TV. It was a happy dream.

In the morning, Violet checked on Peepers, who was in the bathroom practicing her flying skills. She could make it from the cage

to the towel rack with ease, but not yet to the higher shower curtain rod. She didn't know that her life was about to change.



“This is it,” Violet said to the taxi driver. They had stopped in front of a building that took up half the block. The Old Hooper Cooper Mansion. Peepers’s bright future was about to begin.

Violet thought the building looked grand and stately like a church. It had a tall tower over the entrance, and heavy, wooden doors. Two workmen were busy repairing the front steps. Violet told them she was here to see Nan Schmidt. They pointed to an open door at the side of the building.

Violet went to that door with Peepers in her carrying case. There was a very steep ramp going down into darkness.

“Nan? Hello, Nan?”

Nan came up the ramp out of the darkness. She was wearing old blue jeans and that bright smile.

“Hi!” she said. “Come this way.”

“I don’t think I can,” Violet said. “The ramp looks so wobbly.” If only I could fly like Peepers, Violet thought.

Waving her hand, Nan told Violet to go back to the main entrance.

Violet walked into the front hallway. Two more workmen were sanding the floor. They motioned Violet to step out of the way.

Violet heard Nan call, “Keep going and open the large steel door to your right. Sorry, we’re remodeling.”

Everywhere Violet looked there

was debris. She made her way carefully through piles of wood scraps, bags of plaster, and cement rubble. Wires peeked out through the walls. She imagined the mess as the aftermath of a giant dinosaur sneeze.

“Where do I go next?” Violet shouted.

“You’re almost at the steel door. Just open it and I’ll meet you outside,” Nan yelled from somewhere.

Violet continued dodging piles of debris until she reached the steel door. She pushed it open.

Nan was there!

Violet stood in the garden with Nan. Instead of the flowers Violet had expected, it was filled with boards of all sizes and pieces

of plaster, large tools of every description, buckets, and wooden sawhorses. This was not the lush abode that Violet dreamt of the night before.

Nan pointed past the rubble. “Over there is the birdhouse.”

Peepers was very quiet in her carrying case.

Violet took a few stumbling steps. There, in a small clearing, she saw a glorious structure covered in chicken wire. It must have been fifteen feet tall.

The Palace..?

There wasn't a golden cage and Peepers wouldn't have colored TV as Violet had imagined. But all the same it was... heaven!



Inside were three other pigeons.

Nan unlatched the birdhouse door and Violet carefully stepped inside. The three pigeons watched silently from their perches. Violet sat on a small bench and unpacked Peepers and her packet of Puppy Chow. The pigeons eyed them as Peepers and Violet performed their mealtime duet. Peepers ate excitedly from Violet's hand. She paid no attention to her feathered neighbors or to the new sights and sounds in the garden.

The three pigeons continued to study them.

Nan introduced them. Pierre was an apricot beauty. He had been raised to be eaten at a French

restaurant, but had been saved because Nan was able to adopt him, (for a price of course). Puffy, the butterball couldn't fly and was waiting for her wing feathers to grow back. And then there was Squeaks. Squeaks, a youngster like Peepers, with similar black-and-white coloring, glanced at Peepers and then looked away. It was not love at first sight, as Violet had hoped.

Violet left Peepers in the birdhouse and stood outside with Nan, trying to give Peepers emotional support. At first Peepers flew towards her only to be thrown back by the chicken wire. She then frantically flew to the other side of the spacious birdhouse, only to be

met with the same chicken wire blockade.

Peepers's world had changed drastically from what it had been just hours before. She nervously sat on the small bench that she and Violet had shared. She looked at the other pigeons. They looked back. Only Puffy, who couldn't fly, remained on Peepers's level. Squeaks and Pierre stood stately on the highest perch, looking down. Their position on that highest perch told Peepers, below, that they were more important—more powerful than she was. In the bird world, the higher you are, the more supreme. Peepers was not on the ground, but she wasn't at the top either.



“Where will she find her place in the Palace?” Violet wondered.

“Who will befriend her?”

Violet knew it was time to go. She said goodbye to Peepers and slowly followed Nan up the ramp into the twilight. She was leaving precious Peepers with generous Nan. And she was leaving with a grateful but sad heart. Would Peepers learn all she needed to know from her fellow pigeons?

Nan gave Violet a hug. “You can visit anytime you want.” She then excused herself and headed back into the mansion’s jumbled insides.

Violet visited whenever she could. She watched Peepers get

bigger and stronger as the weeks went by. Peepers had learned to eat seed by herself without being hand fed.

One afternoon, while visiting Peepers, Violet noticed a new pigeon in the Palace.



His name was Hubert. He was jet black with an injured left wing. He needed a safe place to stay until it mended. Violet could see Hubert liked Peepers, and Peepers liked Hubert. They always sat together on a perch. Nan said that they snuggled at night. It seemed that Hubert was going to be the ideal partner for Peepers's future.

One day, Nan told Violet that she thought that Peepers and Hubert were ready to leave the Palace. Nan opened the door. Peepers didn't know what to do. Hubert knew, all right, but he didn't want to leave the friendly, cozy world of the Palace.

The two just sat.

Nan opened the Palace door wide every day. There was a big world out there with a tempting big sky above.

Peepers and Hubert still did not budge.

Finally, on the fifth day, it was Peepers who dared to leave the Palace and fly to a tree nearby. Hubert waited several minutes and then followed. The two sat in that tree for a long, long time.

And then...they flew away.



They were doing what they were born to do—enjoying the trees and sky and soaring with the wind.

Hopefully, Peepers would never forget the people who cared for her: Violet in her apartment and Nan at the Palace.

But Peepers is a wild bird.

And together with her friend, Hubert, she is savoring freedom. Flying above the streets, towering buildings, parks, and rivers, she is home at last. The New York City skies are her true Palace.

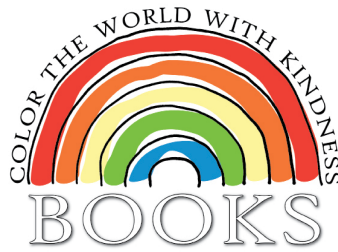
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The Wild Bird Fund's mission is to provide medical care and rehabilitation to injured, ill, and orphaned wildlife of New York City and to release them back to the wild. They are a non-profit 501(c)(3) and the only wildlife rehabilitation facility in New York City.

www.wildbirdfund.org

Peepers





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Books for Kids by Marian and Marc

Available at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

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This is the story of Peepers who was found in a New York City courtyard. Like Peepers, countless baby pigeons fall from their nest. They are left to fend for themselves in a world they know nothing about . Based on a true story, A Palace for Peepers has a happy ending. A heartwarming tale with drawings by MARC CHALVIN. A story for all ages.