

CONVERSATION WITH A DOVE

“The LORD said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by.’ Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave,”
(I Kings 19:11-13, NIV).

The shady jungle in the bird building at the Oklahoma City zoo is a pool of refreshment on a summer day. Bitterns, those brown-feathered members of the heron family, strut gracefully on stilts while foraging for bugs. Ruddy ducks dabble in circles, hiding their azure bills in the cloudy water. In the back third of the building, the ring-necked dove disappears against the weathered wood of a tree branch. When I pause to look for signs of life, he flutters down to perch at eye level. “Coo Cwooooo Coo,” he says.

The peace is shattered when a bittern inflates his esophagus and bellows a pump-er-lunk cry that resonates through the building. He is both calling for a mate and establishing his territory and he will not be denied. “Pump-er-lunk,” he bellows again, and the cry sounds as if it is echoing from an underwater canyon.



A much more powerful force awed the prophet Elijah in chapter 19 of I Kings. In fact, the winds that crumbled Mount Horeb would have silenced both the bittern and his pump-er-lunk. Was God speaking through some kind of seismic code? The mountain shifted that day, but it wasn't the tumble of granite that rearranged Elijah's thinking. The bittern calms down, and I turn back to see that the dove hasn't gone anywhere. His three syllable song woos me and compels me to listen closely. My husband cups his hands in front of his mouth and blows a “Coo Cwooooo Coo” in response. The dove answers back, and the counterpoint of earthly and heavenly voices continues until a snowy crowned robin chat swoops through the room, his belly the color of fire.

The robin chat may have a melodious song, but it's hard to tell since he flits from branch to branch like flames that climb and gyrate. I twirl around, looking for a glimpse of crimson and snow, but he is gone.

The mesmerizing melody, though, is still right behind me. "Coo Cwooooo Coo," flutes the dove. It doesn't change, this soothing sound. The dove becomes more appealing as we converse. His muted colors range from pale gray to slate gray to gray with lavender highlights. I catch my breath as he flies to a perch suspended from the concrete walls. The fly-by birds are still raucous, but the breathy whisper of the dove floats down to me, steady and serene.

A snow-white tail fan appears as the dove stretches his wings. The branches that intersect behind him connect heaven and earth with east and west.