



The Three Pelicans

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The Three Pelicans

Once upon a time there were three pelican brothers. They lived happily with their mother in a big estuary, until one day their mother said it was time for them to make their own way in the world. The pelicans had been frightened and sad, but the next day they flew off, waving goodbye to their mother.

The oldest brother hadn't gone far when he saw a man, enjoying a commanding view from his penthouse balcony. The man looked well fed, was dressed in expensive clothes and wore gold jewellery.

The oldest brother was impressed and landed on the man's balcony rail. 'How should I make my way in the world?'

The man looked at the pelican and smiled. 'The more you've got the greater your success. Acquiring possessions and comforts, is the best way to make your way in the world.'

The pelican looked down at the world spread out below his perch. 'Yes, that is how I will make my way in the world.'

The man was pleased. 'There are two types of people in the world – winners and losers. You've just become a winner.'

The eldest pelican flew off, and cleverly built his life to be expedient and golden.

The middle brother had flown on, until he saw a man jogging. The bird was impressed with how, in his colourful lycra, the man looked strong and pure. He swooped down and asked, 'How should I make my way in the world?'

The man stopped running and put his hands on his knees to catch his breath. 'The only way to make your way in the world is with achievements. There are two types of people in the world. The energetic and the lazy.'

The pelican nodded his beak. 'Yes, that is how I will make my way in the world.' And he built his life with energy and great deeds.

The youngest brother had flown the farthest. He saw a man reading on a bench. The bird thought the man looked wise and thoughtful. Intrigued, the pelican flew down and asked, 'How do I make my way in the world?'

The man closed his book, and examined the pelican through his glasses. 'The only way to make your way in the world is to be rational. Only weak

minds trust their emotions.’

The pelican tucked his bill onto his chest. ‘Yes, that is how I will make my way in the world.’ And he built his life with logic and knowledge.

After a couple of years apart, the three brothers happened to meet again—at Shag Rock. They looked at a shag, shivering with her wings outstretched, trying to dry her sodden feathers.

The oldest pelican, snug in his warm dry feathers, blew out his beak bladder and turned to his brothers. ‘There, but for the grace of God...’

The other two nodded, but when they started talking, they were disappointed to realise that they were not impressed with each other’s achievements. The oldest pelican thought that the other two were losers because he had made much more money. The middle pelican thought his brothers were lazy because they’d done so little, and the young brother thought he was the only one that wasn’t foolish.

The oddest brother saw a Major Mitchell's cockatoo flying past and asked him to come and settle their dispute. He was confident that with the cockatoo’s love of shiny trinkets, the bird would tell the other two how much more successful he’d been.



Photo Courtesy of David M. Kenedy

Once they had explained their disagreement, the cocky lifted his comb and shook his head. ‘None of you are successful. It is the flock that is important. Success is valuable only when it’s shared.’

They watched the cockatoo fly away.

The youngest pelican raised his head on his long neck. 'We don't need a flock to be a success!'

The middle pelican rattled his beak. 'Yeah, he couldn't answer our question. I've always thought their combs were put on too tight. Tell you what, I know a bird that is as sharp as a tack.'

They all flew together and found a Willie wagtail sitting on a table in a garden. The middle pelican was confident that a bird with her energy would see the success of his achievements.

However, when their disagreement was explained, the Willie wagtail looked down at them from her perch. 'How can any of you birds think you are successful? Success is the freedom to make choices. You bladder-beaks have all restricted your choices so much you can only be a success in your own wetland.'

'A crumb thief thinks *we* aren't successful,' the oldest pelican snuffled.

They all fluffed their feathers and flew away.

The youngest pelican asked his brothers to join him on a light pole. As they found a perch with him, he filled his beak and blew a raspberry. 'How could we think a bird with a brain the size of a peanut could have any wisdom for us? We should ask our mother.'

They all agreed and flew off to visit her. The youngest pelican was confident that their mother was old enough to appreciate the value of wisdom. Because they hadn't seen her for a while, they all got her gifts. The oldest son brought her a gold ring, because wealth was most important to him. The middle son brought her an altimeter so she could measure how high she flew, and the youngest son brought her a book because he believed that life was only worthwhile if you have an active mind. They all regaled their mother with their triumphs. She listened to her sons with an amused expression on her face.



Photo courtesy of Jean Foster

Finally, her youngest son asked, ‘Mother, we have all made our way in the world differently, who do you think is the most successful?’

Their mother looked at them shrewdly. ‘Successful, why would you think you’re successful? None of you have a mate. What is the point of building your life when you have no mate to share it with?’

When they left their mother’s estuary, the trio went back to Shag Rock. The shag they’d seen earlier had dried her wings and listened to them complaining about what other birds thought success was. She turned her beak into the wind as if sniffing for a thought. When she turned back to the trio, she said, ‘Birds only believe something can be a success if it makes them right.’

‘What?’ Flapped the youngest brother. ‘Did you hear what that stupid shag said?’

They all shook their heads and rolled their eyes.

‘Ridiculous,’ agreed the middle pelican. ‘Success is success.’

The oldest pelican turned to the middle one. ‘You’re the strongest and bravest bird I know. How can you not be a success?’



The middle brother nodded and turned to their youngest brother, ‘And our young brother is the smartest bird in the land.’

The youngest pelican lifted his wings and pointed his beak at his oldest brother. ‘How could anyone think that you, the wealthiest bird for miles wasn’t a success?’

The brothers filled their beak bladders and blew raspberries.