

Lucy's Dove

From the heart of Mark Kroeger

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I very recently witnessed a captivating moment in time that took place at, of all venues, a small-town ballpark. This event touched me in a way I can't explain except to tell the story so others can make of it what they will.

My wife and I wondered out loud whether or not Lucy's dad, Aaron, would bring little Lucy to her softball game so close to the time in which Leah, Lucy's mother, had succumbed to a long battle with cancer. This battle had been omnipresent for almost all of the six years of Lucy's young life. You see, my granddaughter, Ruby, is Lucy's good friend and Aaron and Leah are Ruby's Godparents. They share many activities together. Over the short years of their young lives, I observed a wonderful mother making every effort to attend Lucy's events even when exhaustion and pain were fighting to keep her from being a part of the little girl's life. Leah was there for Lucy dependably. She was almost always nearby with encouragement and a smile.

Sure enough, on this third day after Leah had lost her struggle with the evil that is cancer, Aaron and Leah's parents were at the ballpark. Lucy was on the field with her teammates being little girls; chasing each other around, acting like kids do when they are around so many friends. My heart was warmed watching this. I was certain that Leah would have wanted it this way; get her beloved daughter "back to normal" as soon as possible.

Shortly after the game started, I noticed some mild commotion behind the bleachers. I heard laughter from some of the adults as my two-year-old grandson, Ruby's brother Harrison, was scurrying after what I thought was a mostly white pigeon. I caught only glimpses of the activity as the bird seemed to be playing a game of "catch me if you can" with the toddler. Each time the little boy closed in, clumsily grasping at tail feathers, the bird would speed up her pace just enough to avoid capture by her new playmate. What seemed like a maneuver to keep Harrison

interested and close by his parents, the bird would jump up, fluttering her wings, barely clearing the boy's head, reversing course of the game. She would light on the ground just in front of the boy and begin her scurrying to barely elude apprehension.

One of the adults cautioned that the bird might be sick since she was in a place no one would expect a bird to be. This was reasonable considering she wouldn't fly off even after being comically pursued by the little boy. The bird then slowed near Aaron, so he decided to see if he could catch her for Harrison. To my amazement, as he was preparing to trap the bird against the fence, she stopped moving and allowed him to pick her up. The calm the bird displayed in his hands was astonishing. She seemed comforted by his touch. I then realized she was too small to be a pigeon, she was a pure white dove with a ring reflecting a goldish color on her left leg. Aaron leaned over allowing Harrison to touch the bird's head. She showed no fear of the little boy reaching out to gently caress her. Harrison now seemed subdued and gentle with the dove, almost displaying a hypnotic reverence. I couldn't help but think how incredible it was that the dove was as calm as if she was completely familiar with the people around her. My thoughts pushed towards the divine. Could this be a sign that Leah was happy with Lucy being among friends? I tried to convince myself that it was a coincidence but the continuing events would not allow me to do so.

Aaron carried the dove to the dugout where the team was waiting their turns to bat. I am not sure, but I would like to believe that Aaron held her out for Lucy to touch. I know that the girls were amazed by the dove's presence. The stirring in the dugout was evidence of their curiosity. Aaron then let her go. She flew into the dugout and calmly hovered around the girls seemingly taking notice of the children admiring the fact that an unusual occurrence was taking place.

After blessing the children with her presence, it was time for the dove to go. I watched as she carefully flew away from the commotion of the dugout and lighted on the ground, one more time, as though she was making a final acknowledgement of Lucy and her friends. Time seemed to slow as the dove then took flight at the edge of the neighboring farmer's field. I could see the movement of every wing and tail feather in vivid contrast to the brilliant green June corn field. The remaining rays of sunlight cast a radiance upon her white feathers as she rose above the field and tree line and into the deep blue evening sky. Then, without giving reason for her appearance, the dove faded into the distance as though being drawn into the heavens. Again, my thoughts drifted towards the divine. This time there was no thought of coincidence; I am convinced the white bird was a heavenly gift sent to show a mother's love and her wish for her daughter to start living anew.

Little Lucy, I hope for you to always remember the gift that was this single white dove. I believe the improbable timing of her arrival, the calmness of her time among us, and the magnificence of her departure are signs from Heaven that your mother is now well and will always be watching over you and yours.

God Bless you all.