

The Songbirds



Gretchen sat down on the park bench, opened the pouch of savory bird treats and filled her cup with them. Then she closed her eyes and tried to keep very still. After a long hour, her patience was rewarded. Six shy little songbirds flew down from the tree and landed at her feet. They made little chirpy noises that seemed to say *“feed me; oh, please feed me!”* And Gretchen was happy to oblige. Gently, so as not to frighten her feathered friends, she plucked a few treats out of the cup and tossed them on the ground. Instantly, the birds attacked the seeds and grain with a vehemence all out of proportion to their pint-size. Why, the biggest bird even viciously pecked the smaller ones as it tried to hog all the treats for itself! “Now now,” cooed Gretchen, “there’s enough for everyone, probably.” She dug a handful of seeds from her cup and flung them towards the birds. Another feathered flurry ensued, and the chirps grew louder, more peevish. Again the big bird scarfed down the lion’s share; then it turned to glare balefully at Gretchen. “Caw!” it said in a tone that brooked no debate. All *right*,” said Gretchen, her voice registering both exasperation and bewilderment. She dumped the remainder of the seed on the ground. “There. That’s the last of it. So don’t come begging for more!” The five smaller birds pounced rapaciously on the thistle and millet. The big bird, however, continued to glower at Gretchen. “Caw!” it repeated. When she didn’t respond, it hopped onto the bench, leaned in and pecked her on the neck. Hard! “Ow!” yelped a very surprised Gretchen. She pressed one hand against the gash to stanch the bleeding; with the other, she tried to shoo away the bird. Instead, the bird grabbed Gretchen’s coffee cup and yanked it out of her hand. “Caw!” it said again, and this time the other birds stopped their squabbling and turned to face Gretchen. As one, they squawked *“caw.”* And then, still peckish, they advanced on her.