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## Possessiveness Brings Life; the Excesses, an End

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Generally, the natives of a country are intolerant of immigrants but not of foreign tourists, whereas the government of the country can put up with anyone except the opposition. And of course, the Almighty has no rival. We lay absolute claim to the house which we build, quite ignoring that many other creatures are there to lay similar claims to it or to a part of it. A lizard, for example, seems to be possessive about the wall on which it catches the insects, for it does not let the other one intrude into its area. In fact, the real owner is God, who enjoys watching all beings struggling up and also enjoying His bounties on the earth, just like we do watching and feeding birds, studying their calls or listening to their songs.

### I

One morning, Drut flew down and perched on the parapet. I called him for the breakfast, but he did not listen to me. Instead, he started making a peculiar shrill sound, transcribed as “chreiii”, which he made when he was in great distress. I was perplexed by his strange behaviour. The look on his face also told me something was wrong. He kept shouting out, paying no attention to me. I suddenly thought of Drishti, and with that looked back at the fence to see if she was on her regular place. She was not there. “My god!” I said to myself and assumed the worst. Jumping up from the chair, I walked forward and raised my head so I could look at him more closely. “Drut, Drut,” I cried with a deep note of sadness in my voice, “tell me what happened. In God’s name, Drut, I need to know if Drishti is all right!” He did not reply, he just peered into the distance, and then without so much as a glance at me, he flew away, screaming. Now I was sure that my sweet little Drishti had been prey to the deadly cat. “You dirty cat, I’ll kill you for that!” I muttered to myself through clenched teeth but thought that it is up to God to decide. I retraced my steps to the chair and sat down, feeling a deep pang of sorrow for her.

The news paper at the table seemed as though it was a pack of clean sheets of paper; and the tea, tasteless. But while I sat speculating on the reasons for Drut’s abnormal activities, my ears pricked up at a short high-pitched sound. I looked around eagerly and saw both Drut and Drishti flying around. When they finally alighted on their regular places, my eyes glittered with delight.

I pulled out a biscuit from the jar, broke it up into small pieces. “My dear Drisht,” I called in an amiable tone of voice, “come here, I’ve some bits of crispy biscuit for you.” She listened to me but responded with a weak tweet only. At first I could not understand what she meant, but it soon occurred to me that she was the victim of male domination so unable to gather courage to eat first. A little while later, Drut flew down, landed on the platform and came jumping near to my chair.

“You love your Drishti?” I said to him. “You little rascal, I can see why you were so upset! Isn’t it true that you cannot enjoy a good meal without her? Anyway, I’d like to thank you for bringing her here. You know, I’d have gone mad if you hadn’t.”

Drut looked very passive as he raised his beak. “Adrritu-cie-cie-psup-psup-chi-chi-chu-chu-chirrr- twit-drooo-chik-ckik-tchirp-cien-cien-trrr...” he said in a low, soft and continuous voice.

“So Drishti had gone away because of a quarrel and it ultimately upset you?” I said, with a loving tenderness in my voice. “Well, you’ve now mollified her so you ought to relax and stop worrying about that. But mind, you won’t quarrel with her again!”

“Pswip-chein-chein-chein-trrr.”

“You’re hungry that I know. I have a biscuit for you, my good lad.”

Soon as I put the bits of the biscuit on the floor, he started pecking at them peacefully. When he was full, he raised his head, gave a chirp and flew away. Just after he was gone, Drishti dived without waiting any longer and started eating the remaining grains greedily. “Chueiin, chueiin,” she said in a thin, high-pitched voice before she flew off.

## II

I constructed a room and a veranda attached to the front of it in my back garden a few years after the house was built. When the construction was completed, a pair of pipits took up residence in the room and started to build a nest in a cosy corner. One night the female laid an egg, then another one the following day and the third on the third day. The female often gave an aggressive call to establish dominance over the male when she had to displace him to incubate eggs. As it was necessary to keep the eggs warm by sitting on them, the parents had to take it in turns to go out for food in the daytime. They continued doing so for twelve days, until the hatchlings came out of the eggs one after the other. Thereafter, from sunrise to sunset every day, they worked to keep them warm and to feed them every fifteen minutes so that their young could grow as quickly as possible.

As the days went by, their eyes began to open, pin feathers grow larger and tails longer. Slowly, the nestlings started to peep and to beg food, giving a “chei-chei-chu-chu” begging call. After another two weeks, the fledglings seemed to be trying to leave the nest in an effort to fly and eat on their own, though they could not yet. Anyway, it took them a couple more weeks to become fully feathered and ready to be weaned. When they were capable of flight, they would come out of the room, hop on the lawns and fly up to the fence. The parent birds would show them what to eat and how to find food, to interact with each other, to keep in touch while flying or to alert one another to the presence of predators. But the training had lasted only for two weeks before the parents left them to live on their own. Thereafter the juveniles roomed happily together but not for long because a terrible thing happened after that.

My house had a large back garden, and a small front garden linked together by a long side yard. A group of warblers and a few squirrels lived in the small trees that border a lawn in the front garden. The juvenile pipits took to sitting in those trees during the daytimes for company. The little fellows would fly in the enclosure, catching insects; and sometimes they would also come into the house and sit on different places: one on a casement, another on a fanlight, one or two on the cupboard top and a few on the floor, singing songs and doing mischievous sport of jumping, fluttering, flying and hitting one another. Slowly they got used to us.

One morning, when they were pecking around in the driveway for food, a cat entered through the gate and ate one of the little pipits. The whole house resounded with the alarm calls of the birds and squirrels. I went out and was shocked to see the ripped feathers and wings of one of my little ones. The next day she hunted one more of the juveniles and then did her worst to kill several nestlings of the warbles nested in the trees and three young squirrels, though she could not eat all her prey. It left me traumatized and the thought that my feathered family was in danger of extinction preyed on my mind. A bitter hostility towards the bloody cat aroused in me as well as in my wife and children. We started chasing the cat out of the house and thus succeeded protecting the remaining babies. With every month that passed the surviving pipit became stronger. One day while I was watching my little ones on the front lawns, I saw it launching itself high from a treetop before parachuting gently back to a desired perch. Now I was sure it was able to protect itself against predators.

After my early-morning walks, I used to sit at a table on the newly constructed veranda with a cup of tea and the newspaper. Sometimes the lively pipit would come there to peck around me. It was such a pleasure to watch it tumbling along and eating bits of something on the platform attached to the veranda. One day I was struck by the thought that it would be nice to give it something to eat, given that there was very little for it to feed on. I scattered seeds over the floor but it did not touch even one. Instead, it preferred, as I made out, picking at the scraps of biscuit and crisp that I had brushed off the table. Since it did not stay long, I picked up the newspaper to relax with it. But as I got up from the chair, I saw the whole family of warblers, a spotted dove, a parrot, a laughing dove, a few buntings, three or four coal tits and a little cluster of weavers pecking at the seeds on the floor. Now I knew how to attract the different species of birds to the backyard.

The pipit came there at the same time next morning too. I spread the potato chip crumbs on the floor near to the legs of my chair. To my surprise, it came jumping up and began to eat them. When he was gone, I scattered seeds over the floor for the other birds. They, too, arrived punctually and after eating them, they went to the puddles near the water garden pump to drink from it. Slowly I grew fond of my winged friends and started feeding them every morning and evening.

It was a holiday. I wanted to spend the day gardening but the birds did not let me because the pipit and the group of other birds kept begging food in turns, each at thirty-minute intervals. When all had gone to their roosts in the evening, I began to mull over whether it would be good to put out a ceramic bird-bath and feeder for the birds to feed and preen and bath whenever they needed and thereby to attract them to the garden, and, finally, it occurred to me that it would be foolish to change their natural life style – for God wants creatures to see busy, or rather a busy life is a happy life. Birds, as they have less responsibility than man, cannot keep themselves busy, unless they have to forage for food to satisfy their recurring hunger.

A year thus passed and the pipit was a slim and elegant adult now. It was only when I saw it joining other birds in singing songs that I knew it was a male bird. I thought it would be nice to call it by a name, so I named it “Drut” after its incredibly fast flight. Drut spent hours every morning singing songs, was calm around midday, and started up again in late afternoon. Sometimes, when I sat listening to what it said, I tried to transcribe its vocalizations, but never once could I hear the note separated into the smaller segments as a series of separate notes sounded to me like one long note. Birds, as it seemed to me, have sense of time resolution, which

is many times better than ours and this is why it is quite easy for them to distinguish a series of varying notes produced by them quite too quickly. It was, however, not hard to distinguish between his songs and calls because his songs were complex and musical and calls simple. He was a fantastic singer with a perfect combination of pitch, tone, rhythm and sound.

Since there was enough food for him in the garden, he grew to be a persistent singer, able to impress a mate. And not long after, he succeeded attracting a female, of which I could know when one morning he came to the veranda with her. She was a lively young bird as well as a delight to see. A sweet name for her came into my mind before I got up to welcome her. "Drishti, come up," I called her endearingly. "I've tasty, tasty pretzels for you." She hopped forward towards me like she had known me. But before she pecked at a morsel, Drut bowled her over perhaps to place himself at the top of the pecking order. Poor Drishti could do nothing but fly up onto the fence and sit waiting for Drut to finish eating. She, however, did not have to wait long. Drut flew away leaving half of the crisps for her and in no time, Drishti flew down and perched on the floor to eat the crumbs. Frightened, she ate quickly. Anyway, they could not do without each other's company and at the same time were never ten minutes in it without bickering. Often they used a soft note "quei-quei" to inhibit aggression.

### III

While returning home from a morning walk, I came across an old friend of mine with whom I talked for a while, standing on the pavement. But as I turned to leave him, I saw a dog standing by me and looking at me with imploring eyes. Then it followed me, too. At first I did not care, but when it kept on, I turned my attention to it and saw it was frightened of something. Just then two other dogs came at it, barking furiously. It hid behind me, its tail between its legs. I wondered why it was so frightened, particularly, of those ones which were not half as strong as it was. Then it suddenly struck me that it must be moving outside his territory and was accompanying me in order to bluff other dogs into thinking that it was my pet. This incident soon made me reflect on how the dogs live by having a mutual agreement not to intrude into each other's territories or win the favour of their human masters. At last, my thought turned to the birds, whom I considered as being better than stray dogs because they, in my opinion, were not mean to each other. But my opinion of them changed after what I saw later that day.

I was a little late because of the pause, so I made straight for the backyard from where a short and high-pitched sound of contact calls was coming. "What? The warblers have arrived first?" I said to myself as I hurried towards the veranda. The regular guests of mine were drifting along the platform, flying and landing frequently, then whirling around to have fun. I became very happy to see them, then glanced up at the parapet to see what Drut was doing and found him glaring at the birds below with an aggressive call as "Cheii-cheii-whithei-chirrr-it-it". I was amazed to see his belligerent gesture and, before I could think of anything else, he dived at one of the tiny birds which went into a skid. His unexpected attack scared away all the birds. "Oh, birds too!" I exclaimed in wonder.

Exasperated with Drut, I went to the chair on the veranda and sat down without paying any further attention to him. He came jumping near me but I still took no notice of him, whereupon he started flying up and down in front of me. Now I could not help myself – I had to look at him. He finally went back to the floor.

“You mean you don’t want other birds to join you?” I said to him fretfully, leaning over him. “Look, I love all the birds that come here and have enough things to feed them all. Besides, birds cannot drink all the water in the well, however large be their number. If you think you’re going to share something with them, you’re very much mistaken. In future, make sure no one is discriminated against.”

When he inferred I was not pleased, he flew up and sat on the table facing me, now warbling in a sweet voice. “You’re sorry perhaps?” I continued, but soon realized that he can communicate his present feelings only.

He, however, chirped with a nod. His innocent expression melted my heart and I could not help loving him more. At last I opened the box and gave him his favourite food. He began to peck at the salty and crispy bits on the table and when he was full, he gave an affectionate tweet and flew away. Drishti, who was sitting on the fence, waiting for her turn, as usual, came down to eat.

I began to keep a close watch on Drut after this incident and deduced from his songs that he sang to form and defend his territory besides during courtship. He spent a good part of the day singing. If any bird dared to enter the area of the newly built room in the back garden, he would give a chase. As for Drishti, she, too, never failed to keep other females away by making a short chattering sound. Now that I felt that they would no longer tolerate any other bird in their territory, I decided to feed them in the back garden and the flock in the front garden every morning and evening.

In the side yard, near the front garden, there was a patio which had earlier been my favourite place to relax. I chose to spend a few moments there too. Slowly warblers, squirrels and other birds living in the trees there took to gathering on the floor.

One evening these members of my extended family were enjoying seeds, jumping mischievously and making fun. Suddenly “trent-trent”, a low pitched call, touched my ears and I was alarmed by the prospect of Drut’s presence. I was right. He was flying up and down in front of the fence like he was swinging in the air at the speed of light. My God, I thought, he’s here too! “Get lost, you little idiot!” I shouted. “You aren’t going to spoil things for everyone else.”

But as I got up to prevent him from coming at the birds, I caught sight of the cat. It was prowling along the fence and Drut was flying at it again and again, hitting it on the head with his pointed bill. I tore off towards them, but before I reached there, he had already forced it to turn back. He then flew towards me and perched on my shoulder to catch his breath. His heroic deed filled me with admiration. “Well done, my boy!” I said, getting back to the chair. “You’ve shown yourself a good brother of all the birds here.”

In fact, Drut liked to enjoy the company of all the birds, but when it came to his territorial area, he made no exception. It was not his fault he was so selfish – everyone loathes his rival and loves his customer.

Next morning, Drut was courting Drishti by chasing her in fast and jerky flight. But as they saw me watching, they landed on the veranda floor. Drut came forward and started begging food. I delayed in order to listen to him talk. “Pswip-chei-chei-cien-cien-chit-trrr” he said. I felt his longing for the food and so could not restrain myself from pitching some pretzels on the floor. But hardly had he begun eating than he heard something and flew away. Drishti followed him all

very quickly. My curiosity got the better of me and I hurried out, too. As I turned towards the side yard, I saw the birds of many species mobbing the cat. Drishti joined them but Drut soon began to hit the cat. I took a stick and jumped the cat. Encouraged by my support, Drishti pitched in and Drut became more aggressive. The cat ran down the drive way, hotly pursued by the two. I stopped to see if a nest had fallen out of a tree and was shocked to find that a wounded squirrel was lying on the ground almost dead and a nest with three nestlings had also come down. There were a few drops of blood near the nest. Perhaps the cat had eaten one or two of the babies. I took the nest and tied it back up in the tree from where it had come. Then put the babies back into it. Meantime, the calls of Drut and Drishti had turned frantic. I looked to see. They were sitting on the gate, looking down at the street. I strode to the gate, opened it anxiously and found the cat dead; a dog was going back.