

Two Kinds of Dove

by Marisa P. Clark

Don't speak to me of doves as birds of peace.

They're fighting at the feeder again—two, each  
with one wing raised, like shark fins in air,

to display the white-striped epaulet. Their calls  
of threat don't sound like much—a gurgled  
squawk, like an uncoiled screen door pushed

open a crack. They remind me of a friend  
who views all things as competition—board games,  
cards, career, romance—but can't for the life of her

figure out what's worth the fight. Namely, our right  
to exist, openly, without censure or fear. She grew up  
queer and well provided for. Better yet, she grew up

loved for who she was, and in a time and place  
she could believe herself entitled to so-called  
inalienable rights. Then Prop 8 passed, a rout

that fleeced her of her flockish hope. She wanted  
a wife and kids, by gum, and probably a picket fence—  
why not aspire to the straightest trappings, the bar

so low? Their standoff means the doves don't eat.

God forbid they choose wise battles or learn to share.  
But maybe there's more to their dispute than meets

the eye: a secret history. When their fighting tips  
the feeder—designed like a picnic bench, its tabletop  
a tray—seed rains down. I know I shouldn't scoff

at those whose holy grail is wedlock or single out  
one friend when, my god, there've been a slew.  
Like them, I celebrated when five Supremes

legalized same-sex marriage, a victory, but not  
for everyone. As if a pacifist, my friend asks why  
we can't all just get along. How conveniently

she forgets her instinct to compete. The showdown  
continues, but more doves, ignoring the posturing  
above, have gathered on the ground to peck

their fill of fallen seed. And now I see my friend

in them: they take for granted the spoils of a war  
they never fought and never thought to study.

I shouldn't judge. I've been both kinds of dove:  
demanding my seat at a table never set for me,  
greedy to partake of all it offered, getting nothing;

or content to scrounge in dirt for castoffs I mistook  
for heaven's windfall, ignoring their true source. My  
most basic needs were met—why strive for more?