

joined the rest beneath the apple tree. One day he will be large enough to challenge the big tom, and snoods will dangle, feet will leap, and feathers will fly.

The last time I saw Tom was when I was packing up my car to go south to Mendocino for Thanksgiving. He came up the driveway strutting and gobbling with his feathers in full display. I stopped my task to watch him and he turned in a circle to show me all his glorious colors before he walked back down the hill to his hens. I suspect he wanted to remind me to stop off at the coop to feed everyone before I hit the road.

When I returned from my trip, I didn't see the turkeys the first day, and on the second, only the girls showed up. On the third day, the hens returned, followed by three other males and no Tom. I felt dread in the pit of my stomach. Something had happened to him over Thanksgiving.

I found myself really missing Tom. A stab of grief would hit me every time the turkey hens would come running from the orchard for their portion of grain with no Tom. I missed his wonderful voice. I missed how he would walk up to me when I would sit in my chair at the coop and turn his head to peer at me with one eye, then gobble a greeting and go down to get his grain. The three hooligans (my name for the three new toms) come by once in a while, but they are very afraid of me and make no contact at all. They are also pushy with the others, shoving them aside to get more than their share of the food I throw out.

It's been months now since Tom's disappearance, and I still miss him. It is a wonderful feeling to be able to communicate with a wild creature even to a small degree. I did not imagine that when Tom came up to talk to me as I loaded the car for my trip, showing me how beautiful he was in full display, it would be goodbye. Δ

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