Peregrine Rescue

A happy, true story from May, 2022

Salem built a log cabin among cliffs of Navajo Sandstone in Southeastern Utah, not far from Capitol Reef. He took a little nap, so I took a little walk on a brisk, fiercely windy day. After that, I decided that I, too, would benefit from a little down time...on the deck in the lee of his cabin.

The view from the deck

I was drifting gently when I heard a loud bang...which was puzzling. There are no trees over the roof to drop branches or big cones. The cliffs are too far away to drop rocks. While wood planks can "pop" or squeak when they expand and contract, this sounded more like something striking the side of the house. The back door was open, and it had a pane of glass which might have been reflecting sky with ponderosas and junipers.

I got up after a while and found a peregrine falcon lying on its back on the small porch next to the door. The bird was breathing, and it looked directly at me with blood orange, piercing eyes. I picked him* up, cradled him in a more normal position, kept him warm, and gently stroked his slate gray back. Those predator eyes became more active, and that flesh-tearing beak slowly stopped gasping frantically. He had a wormlike, black tongue, which also slowed its thrusting with time. His legs were folded under him. At first he didn't move them, which made me fear he was paralyzed...but...*no!* He started moving his talons, and when I slipped my pinkie under one, he gripped it tightly enough to demonstrate that those talons are sharp! The other leg followed.

Meanwhile, a chipmunk started squeaking and showed himself about 5 feet away (probably the only time he'll get that close to a peregrine and live to tell the tale.)

I gradually opened my bottom hand and kept stroking the peregrine's back. That went on for perhaps a half hour...just the stunned little falcon and the wistful old man under a big, cold sky. The predator's muscle tone steadily improved, but he did not struggle.

He was a little bigger than a robin...not as big as a crow. I suspect from his aeronautical judgment error that he might have been a rather young one. His checkered beige and brown underside, the slate gray back with subtle, darker stripes on the tail, the black beak with a yellowish base...and oh golly that beak...were all right out of the book. I later googled the ID, and no question about it: The fastest bird in the world resting in my hand.

My hand was almost open. In a blink, he thrust away and flew around the corner of the cabin and disappeared. I had no photos, alas. Nobody will believe this story.

Then, on the other side of the cabin, there he was, perched in a piñon.

A half hour later, he was off. We wish you well.

Wells

** Note—Sorry about the "him" pronoun assumption. I don't know how to tell gender in birds, even lying belly up in my palm. I mostly figured boys are reckless at speed sports, and I just couldn't do the "they."*