

Magpies, in Black and White

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Most magpies are a backyard pleasure
An adjunct to the weekend's leisure.
We share the garden, co-existing,
Each to our role, and unprotesting.

We delight at nature's near contact
And the chance we have to interact
With this master of the world outside
A bird with character, bold, bright-eyed.

It's such a thrill, delightful for us,
To hear in bed their sweet dawn chorus.
Throughout the day, their songs enchant us
We're thankful for those airs they grant us.

We admire their black and white profile
When we see them perching for a while
In the gum tree in the corner yard
That they use whenever they are on guard.

Our lives criss-cross, we see them always,
Perching, feeding, and flying displays,
Or drinking from the shaded bird bath
That's set up alongside our back path.

When we dig the soil they wait behind
Ready to grab any worms we find,
Carolling softly, which in essence,
Reminds us of their waiting presence.

When we're alfresco, they're unfailing
To sit on the verandah railing
And wait for the meat scraps we provide
In pleasure to our friend from outside.

This pattern stays for most of the year
We're very pleased that these birds are near.
But then spring comes, the birds start breeding,
With turf to guard, and chicks for feeding.

Our friendship now becomes somewhat stopped
Because in spring some rogue birds adopt
A habit which we wish was lacking,
A nasty habit – of attacking!

Our garden mates still recognise us.
They'll not be the ones to surprise us.
It's that other one, from down the street
Which becomes the bird we hate to meet.

If we walk past, it becomes incensed
At our intrusion, that we'd never sensed,
And from behind, it launches at us,
Our peaceful walk, it rudely shatters.

It doesn't take much to raise our flap
We hear a wing beat and a bill clap,
Feel the wind from the bird's close passage,
And that's enough to get the message.

A cold frisson of fear runs through us
We know what this bird can do to us.
We've met rogues before, so well we know
It won't be one swoop, and blood might flow.

It goes behind, renews the attack
Its preference is to come from back.
This time a strike, body on body
Next time a bill jab, and we're bloody.

With arms shrouding our head, we retreat,
Undignified, fleeing down the street
Until the bird has driven us out.
It wasn't a battle, more a rout!

We shake our fist, curse the dratted bird
Hatred, fear in our every word.
No thoughts of friendship are in our mind
But there's a truth that we need to find.

The DNA in that bird we hate
Is just the same in our backyard mate.
Whose boldness, which we find endearing
Is also in that bird we're fearing.

The truth about the magpie, as we know
It alternates between friend and foe.
A plain-plumaged bird, with colour none
It's black and white in more ways than one.