



Common Goldeneye Duckling

*My heart is broken; tears saturate my face. Mother Nature can be difficult to comprehend at times.*

*An hour before the first rays of golden sun grace the tree tops circling Little Notch Pond in Moosehead Junction Township, exhilaration fills my mind and soul with the anticipation of spending a wonderful day in the northern forest. The drumming of a ruffed grouse accompanies a choir of songbirds. A mother common goldeneye duck sleeps on the center of the pond, while her two ducklings remain hidden among the reed-laden shallow edge, safe from the dangers of the night. The mother awakens and begins to feed by diving below the water's surface for her breakfast. She beckons her babies to commence feeding. The adorable bundles of downy feathers feed in the shallows while mom feeds in the deeper water.*

*One of the charming ducklings paddles towards me through the reeds and grasses that tower over its diminutive body. The healthy-appearing duckling springs upward to reach the uppermost portions of the vegetation to obtain food.*

*Finishing its breakfast the duckling swims 50 feet offshore to rest briefly on a small boulder. Only minutes later it leaves the boulder, and begins swimming laboriously. Mother duck swims toward the duckling while calling for her babies. The second duckling swims from the shoreline towards her, but the other duckling is swimming in circles and does not respond to its mother's cries. The mother calls louder, but the duckling continues ignoring her as it persists with swimming in random circles. Through a telephoto lens I observe the duckling swimming with its head dropping low; it eventually droops into the water. My hope is that the duckling is feeding on food located just beneath the surface. However a couple minutes pass and the duckling does not raise its head from the water to breathe. I frighteningly realize I am watching this beautiful, innocent, and young animal die right before my helpless eyes. Within seconds it stops swimming and its body becomes listless, with its drooping head submerged in the water. It is dead. I break down in saddened tears. Its mother and one sibling continue to feed, but finally notice something is amiss. They both approach the dead duckling. The mother calls to the duck; the surviving baby reaches out to touch its deceased sibling. Minutes later they swim away; the dead baby's body floats away in the opposite direction.*

*Witnessing the untimely death of this duckling has disturbed me immensely. My wonderful day in the forest is shattered. Little Notch Pond is wild and breathtaking with crystal clear water, but is this water deceiving? Is there an unseen danger that caused the duckling to die this sickening death?*

*I return home, prematurely, in the early afternoon, too emotionally drained to sustain myself physically and remain in the forest. Arriving home the tears continue to flow as Lee Ann comforts me; I am still deeply saddened and concerned by the duckling's unfortunate death. Lee Ann suggests that my grief may be displaced. She boldly, and perhaps correctly, states that "Maybe you are crying for all of the wildlife that has, and will, succumb due to the catastrophic oil spill that is occurring in the Gulf of Mexico."*

*Mankind is killing wildlife, and his own planet. The earth is now bleeding. And its blood is black.*

Thomas Mark Szelog

