

## THE FEATHERED FAIRY

One strange, spring morning –neither my first nor my last– while enjoying the pleasure of a sunrise, I was confronted by a particularly bold, little bird– a small sparrow I believe. He landed directly on the windowsill I had been sitting at and began to incessantly chirp. Gradually, the noises he was making took on a familiar tone and, anything but amazed, I was suddenly able to understand him.

“...So I just flew in and heard some music from this window and thought I might join you. May I join you?”

For some essential, but inarticulate reason, it seemed a rather natural request in that late hour and, almost outside myself, I asked him inside. His head rapidly moved back and forth to alternately look at me and listen to the music I had playing.

“What music is this? I like it.”

I hesitated for a moment, mumbling something about a dead rose beauty and her lost talisman, then fell to distraction from the mixing of worlds in the pale sky of the breaking dawn behind him – so sparingly punctuated by pink and blue clouds.

“Why are you playing music, anyways?”

I finally said that those were both very odd questions, if everything was considered, but explained that it was one of those hardened habits inherited from childhood; that I always left a song playing when leaving to go somewhere, exit music I uncreatively called it.

“Well, where are you going then?”

Despite the perfectly freeing circumstances and the extraordinary nature of my interlocutor, I saw no reason to be totally transparent with a stranger and told him I didn’t really know, but probably nowhere in particular.

“Everywhere is somewhere. You’re a strange human”

Smiling, I put up my hands in a halting motion and said in definite terms that I agreed with him on the first point, but that I was in fact a human shaped kite whose string had been cut away from him – rendering a great likeness to a human and that it was a perfectly reasonable mistake of him to make; one in fact that I encountered with most first acquaintances. At this remark the bird craned his neck to either side so as to inspect me more thoroughly.

“No, I’m sure you’re a human. I’ve lived here for a long time in your garden and you are definitely human.”

I smiled again and patted my body down as physical confirmation before agreeing with him. I confessed in all possible politeness that I hadn’t seen him before and asked him how long we had been such intimate neighbors.

“Oh, you probably don’t recognize me because I haven’t lived here for a couple years. Almost two years exactly...” He stopped abruptly and hopped a few times to look back out to the garden. I took a sip from my glass and he turned toward me at the sound of it. Shy, slanted light shimmered in the jostled drink.

“What are you drinking?”

I apologized for my lack of manners and offered him, not without a certain air of reflexive hospitality, a drink as well. I said I didn't really know, I had stopped paying attention to such things a long time ago, and poured out a thimble of a drink into the smallest glass I could find. We both nodded to each other in silent cheers.

"You see I had to leave... my species of bird mates for life... all our days are spent together, gathering, caring for our young, and helping out our fellow birds. If you lose your mate, none of that is possible and you are excluded forever."

I asked him if it wasn't terribly lonely being excluded forever, but he merely hopped idly and continued to chirp – seemingly for his own pleasure.

"Ah, loneliness. Won't you come and look at the withered branches among those trees?"

Pecking a sip from his drink, he hopped around and pointed with his entire body to the line of trees along the far, eastern side of the garden.

"They were less lonely back then, I think, when I used to sadly sing in them after my mate was lost. Day after day, like a prayer I sang: here I sit and here I sing, till the end of my days..."

I told him that I had coincidentally watched those very branches many times before over the past two years. I admitted somewhat self-consciously that it might as well –from sheer frequency– have become my job by now to watch those trees, to see them sway in the wind and silently blur the sky and sunlight behind them.

But left alone or not, like everything else, those branches would eventually break; and the very pattern and beauty of how the morning light streams through them is made by that same

breaking. Suddenly I felt awkward and blundering, but the bird salvaged my poor phrasing with the proper solemnity my words had failed to convey.

“Then you understand what I’m saying, my friend. It’s very good to have such a person to talk to when drinking... Ah! But the question now is how to live our lives, eh? We can’t drink every night...”

I mentioned as an interesting extension, that this was no different than to ask how we should end our lives.

“How right you are! How right you are indeed! And that’s precisely why I decided it would be better to leave my fellow birds and be alone with my fate. I’ve been traveling ever since, you know... Ah, my friend, I’ve seen so many faces and places since then—”

He laughed in a singsong way, with a very sweet upper register “I even went back to the place where my mate and I met – a beautiful, abandoned church further south where we migrate to in winter– but my friend, there was nothing there! Nothing there but lifeless ruins that I recognized but no longer loved... all of a sudden none of it seemed to be worth anything to me and my wings led me back here ... You know my friend, the other birds I met in my travels gave me hope and told me that time soothes all sorrows – and I don’t blame them, it would have been cruel to say anything else to a bird in my position, no?”

He tilted his head and chirped something like a whistling sigh.

“...But it made it all the more cruel to realize that how it starts is how it ends...”

I offered the curious creature my condolences in a way; saying that if he really thought about it, although it may seem like a trick, words are the source of all misunderstandings. To my pleasure and surprise, he immediately laughed.

“I guess you’re right about that! ... Yes, my friend, yes I’m lonely, I’ve been lonely for a long time, but what can I do? What can I do my friend? Not all nights can be filled with drink and good conversation like tonight, so I sing my friend. I sing and I sing!”

I assured him that everyone has wasted time for one reason or another, years of it even – just like the starlight that makes such a long journey only to be stopped by our eyes in the night, and it’s neither the place of birds nor humans to quarrel over light. Hopefully, since we all share in that experience, it makes us all the more forgiving and compassionate. I attempted to underline this sentiment directly by refilling our glasses.

“Ah, such a pretty drink in a pretty glass... That reminds me my friend, where is the pretty girl human who lives here? I remember she had such beautiful eyes and black hair – it was always a topic among the birds in those days and I would like to see her again”

I smiled –he was hardly a stranger anymore– and told him simply that she had left, again coincidentally, the same time he had. By this point in the conversation with the bird, I had accepted that I had missed my timing with the sunrise and got up to shut off the music and put the pistol resting on the speakers back in its case.

“Ah, I’m sorry of course... but you’re in luck my friend. Be happy, you’re not subject to the silly rules of birds. You’re a human among billions of other humans! You will find another soon.”

I explained far less eloquently and in many more words and drinks than are written here that humans also have rules. We are all irredeemably alone in this life. There is precious little of you to give and the giving and taking with someone is entirely out of your control. That’s why she was unique in all the billions and billions and why she always would be. My heart says she is everything, my head says she is nothing, and between the two life goes on.

“Ah, I see... then I shall sing for you too, my friend.”

But what need is there to sing for parts of life? The whole of it calls for a melancholy melody.