

Migration

The birds were talking to me. They were all there; the juncos, the sparrows, the warblers. They called to me to come and fly with them; to join them in their swooping and soaring near the ceiling of the sky. Their voices were raised in unison, harmoniously filling the cold air.

"Why are you still here?" I called to them from my bed. "Winter is coming. You should be leaving soon."

I could see them on the other side of the glass. Perspiration clung to my naked body beneath the heavy wool blankets that he had carefully placed over me. The air in the overheated room was stale and heavy.

I reached up to open the window to better hear them and to let in the cold air. The window fell open wider than intended, and cold, moist air rolled in like a coastal fog. It smelled of mold and decay.

As the cold air hit my feverish face, I kicked off the heavy blankets, and lay naked to the sensation. I breathed the coolness into my hot lungs.

Their love song filled the room and then my spirit. The dark cloud within started to lift as I gave myself to their song.

I supposed that the thought of creating a human being deep inside of me, only to have it pass out through some enlarged passage, has always been a fascination. I had believed that at some time it would be inevitable, that as a female, it would be a part of my life. But my life moved and changed and formed in unexpected ways. And I saw no need for reproduction.

They say that you can't possibly know that there was a successful union of egg and sperm after such a short time. But I did. I knew within a few weeks. My body told me in symptoms that could have been confused with the flu. But I knew that something was terribly wrong. I knew my body's rhythms and flows intimately, and I wasn't familiar with these new sensations.

I pulled the blankets up to cover myself when I heard his heavy footsteps coming down the hall.

"I thought I heard you stirring," he said as he moved to shut the window. "How are you feeling?" He was dressed in his blue jeans and rag sweater. It didn't seem like he should be here.

"Please don't shut the win-

dow. I need the air," I said.

"It's forty degrees out, babe. You're sick enough as it is." He slammed the window shut and pulled the blankets to my chin.

I peered at him through half-closed eyes as he started to make some order of my disorder. His large callused hands gently picked up and folded my clothes that I had thrown about the room.

"You don't have to clean up after me," I said.

He continued folding, smoothing, stacking, opening and closing drawers. He looked content, though he wasn't smiling. He was humming as he moved through the room leaving an organized path in his wake.

"How about some food?" he asked. I nodded and he left the room.

Mike later returned with a bowl of chicken soup. He had been doting over me like a mother the last few days. I didn't particularly care for chicken soup, but politely accepted and ate some.

How could he know that I didn't like chicken soup? In the six months that we had been together, I had never been in need of soup. He was kind to me. He said that he loved me.

He was just one of the many men that had been in my life filling the void. Now he had filled my void; the one between my hips that had been empty for more than twenty years. My God Mike, how is it that your sperm were able to break through the rubber and wire barrier that had carefully guarded it all of these years?

This was my bed, my room, my house, but Mike had been living here mostly for the last two months. He still kept his apartment in town, but hadn't slept there for a while. He said that he liked having his own place to go to be alone. I agreed. It is good to be alone.

He'll probably want to marry me. I groaned.

Mike looked up from dusting off the chest of drawers.

"Are you all right?" he asked. "I think that I'd like to sleep now," I said pushing the tray with the bowl of unfinished soup away from me.

He picked up the tray and kissed me on the forehead.

"Sleep tight. I think that I'll just clean up the house a little bit, if the noise won't bother you," he said. He looked at me through his

frameless glasses.

"Fine," I said turning over putting my back toward him. He didn't approve of my housekeeping habits, or lack thereof. So be it. He didn't approve of me in other ways, though he had never said it in words.

The room felt normal again after he left. I could hear him in the kitchen scraping, rinsing, stacking, and running water. I had just fallen into that make-believe world of dreaming when I heard the vacuum start. Jesus Mike, I just vacuumed last week.

I curled up with my hands flat on my belly thinking about the mass of cells growing deep inside of me like a clinical specimen in a fertile solution. I could visualize it growing and dividing, only to grow and divide again, again and again, filling my dark cavity.

Mike was gone when I finally decided to get up. Sleep was not coming back to me. His note said that he had gone home to get some things. Piece by piece he is settling into my life, I thought.

The house had turned dark with the early fall dusk. My skin was sticky from sweat. The air was stuffy and hot from the efficient furnace that was left on to warm me in Mike's absence. I turned on lights as I went room to room which exposed his handiwork of cleaning, straightening, and organizing. It looked foreign to me.

I stood at the open refrigerator foraging for food and cooling myself. A white carton of the Chinese take-out food sat solo on the second shelf. I opened it and looked in at the soggy shrimp and vegetables sitting in a congealed mass of unnatural looking, violent red sauce; sweet and sour.

Sitting at the breakfast bar, I slowly chewed the rubbery shrimp and looked at the calendar. I recalculated the days wishing that I had made a mistake. But I hadn't.

I thought about all the other women who have had to face this same thing, every month of every year of their fertility.

Did my grandmother keep a calendar with days of the month circled in red, I wondered. What was in her mind when she knew that she was pregnant with her twelfth child at forty-eight with a bad heart that kept her bedridden most of the time? Surely it was God's way that she die. Blind faith allows no options.

I was still hungry after I fin-

ished the carton of soggy red shrimp and vegetables. I was standing in front of the open refrigerator when Mike came back.

"How you feeling, babe?" he asked. His black hair was sticking up in random points from the force of the fall wind blowing outside.

"Better, I guess." I resented his intrusion. "I'm hungry, did you eat anything?"

"Yeah, I stopped and got a burger," he said.

I wanted to ask why he didn't bring me one but I stopped myself. I poured myself a glass of milk and went into the living room.

"You know, going over to my place tonight got me to thinking about us." He followed me and sat at my feet at the other end of the couch. "Don't you think that it's about time I gave up my place and moved in here full-time? We could use the extra money to put into our travelling fund." His voice rose a couple of pitches with "travelling fund."

He was rubbing my sock-covered feet and grinning his five-year-old boy grin.

"I really don't want to talk about it tonight," I said. My voice was sharper than I had meant it to be. His grin fell away.

"Okay then. When?" he asked.

"When what?" I said.

"When do you want to talk about it?"

I looked at him. He looked small, like he was shrinking into himself, his fertile self. I wondered in he knew he was fertile; if he had impregnated many women.

"When I feel better," I said. I doubted that I was ever going to feel better; to feel like my old, young self again.

"Of course. I'm sorry. Can I get you anything?" He leaned toward me, placed my face between his rough hands, and kissed me lightly on the forehead.

"No. Thank you. I'm sure I'm fine," I said.

That night I slept with the window open. Mike didn't argue, he just put on another blanket.

I dreamt that I was flying with the purple martins. We were flying south to the warmth and bright days of Costa Rica. We raced together in the flyway that we have always used. We soared high above the coastline, near the ceiling of the sky, leaving the damp, the cold, and the dark.

We sang our farewell song to all who would listen.

-by Karen DeVoll

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