



searching for bird

Written by bubba



6:42am

In a car, riding as a backseat passenger thinking I can't get where I need to go to find my daughter. It's me with others, people I know and feel close to but can't recognize beyond feelings of familiarity, wonder why we're in the desert. *We've gone past Arizona*, I think. *We're further than we're supposed to be*. I'm not sure where it is I'm supposed to end up geographically, but know I am en route to see my baby and that excites me. I keep it inside, try and keep focused. Now I recognize the driver – Heather, from work. Travis is here too. He fades in and out but seems to

agree with me that we aren't in the right area. I leave to wade through a small lake. It reminds me of the water supply on Huron and 105th in Northglenn. I'm looking for something but am not sure what. I leave with nothing, feel somewhat nervous and re-enter the car with others, wondering why I'm not wet.

After driving for awhile, I see some luxury houses out the left side of the window. They look familiar to me...built of custom stone and mimicking the landscape of the surrounding rocky foothills. "Hey I think I know this place," I say. "Pull over." We stop at an outdoor mall and I again feel closer to my destination, albeit unsure what it is. I see a resting bench with some writing on the back and become excited that the letters will offer insight as to where we are - *Genesee*. Seated on the bench is a family headed by a woman who wishes to remain anonymous. She holds a veil in front of her face so as not to be recognized. As we approach, I hear talk of an awards show and learn that the woman is a famous actress. When she sneezes a moment later, the veil falls to the ground. I see her face fully and the disguise is wasted on me. I don't recognize her either way.



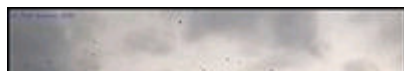
Above the Genesee Mall there is a lounge of sort. The room is shared between the Hilton Hotel and the mall, requiring that you adjust the thermostat by clicking a switch to Genesee or to Hilton. I'm very cold. There is a host of people from my past congregating here. Some of them I've seen in recent years, some I haven't. Some are dead and I'm surprised to see them again. I recognize Linda Drabek (now dead), Linda Allely, Kelly Vigil, Jeff Graves & Troy Brees. There are more too, but I am too preoccupied to care who they are. I shiver and think about when the next time is that I will see my wife and daughter. Someone finally clicks the thermostat to the Hilton side and the room begins to warm.

I exit undetected because I have somewhere to be. I walk off the mall property, past the custom homes and begin hiking up a rocky hillside. In hours, I arrive at an open and vast valley and see the campsite where Rhonda is. She is happy and she is waiting for me. For the final few dozen footsteps that I must walk to reach her, I marvel at the openness of the valley and the height of the canyon walls that extend higher and further than I can see. The campsite is on an incline...built, I assume, by the man with Rhonda - a stranger but not threatening in any way. He reminds me of a hunting and fishing guide. *We've been waiting for you*, he tells me, though he doesn't use words so I am unclear how I understand him.

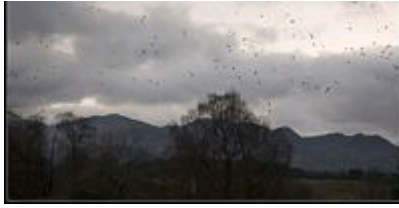


"Where's the bird?" I ask Rhonda.

"She's here," she says. "Call her."



There's a sound I make that gets my daughter's attention. It's a sing-song



way of saying “bird”, the nickname I gave her at birth that she has grown into over time. Only I do it and she now correlates that sound with me being close to her. So I call the bird, listening to my voice echo off the canyon walls. Thousands of birds flock towards me. None are her. For a moment I wonder if I can recognize her amidst so many others. I keep calling, feeling the early stages of desperation preparing in my stomach.

“Bird!” I call again. More come. None are my daughter. I watch a beautiful red cardinal land on my overnight bag and crawl inside, hoping that in the day that I have been gone my baby has grown into something more beautiful than I remember, yet is still remembering me and knowing that she can come to me for safety. I look closer. It’s not her. The calls continue but the flock is now thinning. Most of the birds seem to be noticing that whatever they thought they were being summoned for doesn’t actually include them. With no food or anything else interesting, they begin to move on.

“Bird!” I call again, a little shaky. I’m hoping my daughter knows that there is something here for her. I’m hoping that she won’t fly away. “Bird!” Rhonda and the guide watch me screaming, further away from me now, seeing my panic increase, watching me fall apart. “Where is she?” I sob. “Where is the bird?”

It begins to rain, causing the remaining birds to stop loitering and make one final assessment of me, of the place. I’m temporarily hopeful that the reduction of the masses will allow me to see that my little bird has been waiting for me the entire time. She’s just been eclipsed by all the others. I close my eyes, trying my best to make my daughters special sound familiar to her despite the tears. When I open my eyes, I have nothing. I am alone. (I wake)

*I wake up feeling more alone than I ever have. This dark room is unfamiliar and I think that it must be where people who have nothing end up. Even walking around the house doesn’t immediately help. Maggie hears me and wants outside. I open the door and watch her run from me, feeling again abandoned. Rain falls steady, as it did just moments earlier in the valley. I scan the trees for bird, see nothing.*



*Back in the foreign room I sit on the edge of the bed and contemplate how I might feel better. Things are coming back to me now and I’m aware of the possibility that the valley may have been a dream. I remember that Ava isn’t a bird and that I came into the guest room last night when she erupted into tears around 2 a.m. and then fell asleep in my part of our bed, leaving no room for me. I left so as not to disturb her. I pad to the other side of the house to test this memory. In our bed sleeps my wife. Next to her, Ava is arched into the position of a fallen angel, arms extended, eyes closed. She is breathing. She is alive.*

*I sit at the kitchen table wondering why the feeling of desolation won’t fade along with the dream. My concern for my family and especially daughter has accelerated lately. I am constantly thinking about loss and safety. Last night Avalena lunged forward and toppled off the couch, rolling harmlessly onto the carpet below. I’d been watching her closely, redirecting her several times so she wouldn’t fall. When she fell, I felt terrible; I failed my daughter. How did I miss her? I’m not paying enough attention. She’ll never trust me. I need to be better, try harder, can’t ever turn my back on my bird. She was fine. I was wounded.*

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