

DELIRIUM

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If given the chance to choose, I don't think I'd want to reincarnate as a bird.

Back when the first wave of reality hit us harder than puberty, I began seeking solace in reveries like the river Lethe, washing away my current memories with little promise, but optimism stronger than Muhammed Ali. Many others did the same, there was nothing special about it. As I plotted out my fabled escape, you stood spectating, occasionally indulging in the low-cost luxury of daydreams. Our dreams did not follow the same route, but they did intersect, similar to one of those crossover episodes of our favourite shows we were so fond of. You were welcome in my myths, and I in yours. There would be an extra hammock outside my cottage in the middle of the forest for you, and there would be a well-furnished room in your extravagant apartment for me. Back when we had seen enough of life to want to escape its apprentice-level of hardships, I wanted to be a bird.

The wish itself was pretty mediocre and commonplace, a mundane fantasy to escape the mundane. I did not put much thought into it, and you too took it with a grain of salt. It's hard to achieve consistency at an age when you haven't gotten butterflies in your stomach quite yet, but you do have dragonflies in your bloodstream, your brain and body. It's hard work being restless.

I was unhappy back then, uptight like

one of those wind-up cars, ready to leave home. The cacophony of conflict would crowd the halls of my home every single day. I wanted to be a bird and leave the nest, but you see, I forgot that birds too have to return home.

But, do they? Say, if a migratory bird gets redolent of the home they left behind, of the greener grass, of the known barometric pressure, and strays from the pack, what do they do? Do they go ahead and build a home of their own? Or do they stay back and settle?

I wanted to be a bird. Let me tell you when that stopped.

A few years ago, on a regular working day, the sky was identical to one of the mornings I woke up for school and felt my heart do an acrobatic flip because there was no raincoat in the world that could cushion me from the downpour. It was my fault for not checking in earlier, and unfortunately, rain no longer interpreted directly to a day of snug stay of splaying out in the bed. I battled against the yodeling wind with traces of ice-cold water to close the door to my place. I was rapping out obscenities in my mother tongue directed at my crippled umbrella. That is when I saw the bird.

It was a foreign version of our very own native sparrow, looking like a water-filled balloon with its wings soaked in water. The bird was quivering like a leaf, and I had a fleeting thought to open the door and try to let it in but I was already late, and I was not about to assume the bird would not inter-

pret my hospitality as hostility, so I left.

The rest of the day I could not stop thinking about the bird – while gnawing on a bone-dry sandwich I bought from a deli and trying to wash it down with tepid water, while tapping in monotonous numbers in the datasheet all evening, even when my lovely co-worker was chatting me up, albeit in her systematic ploy to hand me her portion of the work and leave early.

By the time I got home, the bird was gone, as was expected. But I still wondered, did it have a place to go to?

Tiredness loomed over me like a tidal wave, some days more than others. As I completed my *sehri* of two pieces of bread and a glass of milk, both days from going bad, I know I'd suffer from acidity the following day. I noticed the swollen eye bags and thinning hair as I scrutinised my appearance on the reflective surface of my fridge – I look like my father.

Abba passed away last year, I don't know whether you've heard, though the possibilities of me knowing the details are slimmer compared to yours, I did not go for a visit. I cannot say I have any regrets over this – the infinitesimal memories etched in my brain of him are not quite pleasant, and the rest I had to scrub off for many years. I feel selfish sometimes, but I also comprehend that if I'd shown this kind of pompousness earlier, I could have lived better.

The occasional grapple of fatigue aside, I'm not doing too bad. I dug myself a small garden in the slice of land I have and peppered it with some value packs of mystery

seeds. Though I still have to buy the bulk of my groceries, and most of the little of what I grow is ravished by the squirrels and the birds, I don't really mind. I suppose it's a way for me to repent for not letting in that lone, tired bird.

I shop for the week at a time, cook when I will to, and store it in little plastic boxes. I go outside sometimes but spend most of my days being a piece of furniture in my own home. I remained surprisingly domestic after having travelled this far from my first home – my blood was never spiked with adventure.

I don't think there will ever be a homecoming for me, I'm not a bird, I have no place to migrate to, nor a trail to lose.

Ever since I moved here, and even before that, I did a silly thing where I'd close my eyes and run my fingers through my own hair, pretending it was someone else tending to me. At the times of my ailment, in my fever dreams, I liked to think that it was my *Amma* by my pillow.

Self-deception and delirium are all they have been, but it was still a wishful thought that brought me momentary contentment.

I also like to think that, if I were to stand by your window, drenched in rain and wallowing in pity, you would not turn me away.

Upoma Aziz is a slouching, crouching, grouchy Goblin with a hoarding issue. Hold a virtual intervention for her to declutter her desk and her mind at upoma.aziz@gmail.com



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