

POETRY

The Swallow with the Injured Wing

By Faysal Mikdadi

So much was going on in life that he neither controlled anything
Nor understood much – sinking fast into helpless wonder.
There is a time in every life when age presents the unexpected;
And piles on the unknown – further unsolicited – glued to the unwanted.
There are, still, many compensating moments meandering through the confusion.
Good books do much – rather like meeting old friends
And reliving the distant past haloed with the romance of old times.
Nature, so safely predictable in its changing seasons,
Always fills his heart with joy – he feels immortal talking to his trees
Which will stand erect long after he has returned to ashes and dreams.

He stepped into the garden carrying a niggling pain but not knowing where it was.
It moved according to the season of thought and the images of imagination.
There, in his little forest, he sought shelter amidst his ancient friends:
Each tree with a story to tell – there the Eucalyptus which kept falling down
And which he replanted so many times amidst the stars, dark winter nights and against the strong
winds.

And there, bent double, is the apple tree whose apples always taste bitter
Like life's little stories written by those around but not of him.
The Maple tree looks resplendent in its green fluttering dress
Throwing a circular shade amidst the healthy flowers surrounding it.

As his eyes wandered from tree to tree describing a perfect circle
They fell on a fluttering grey leaf that appeared to move unaided.
He approached it and recognised a small bird – squat; with one wing extended.
It did not move at his approach and resisted not his gentle touch as he cupped its minute frame in
his hand.

He held it up and stared into its little eyes – wide open and terrified.
'Don't be frightened little one. Don't be frightened little swallow. All is all right. All will be well
now...'

The bird flopped upon his hand and looked around – exhausted just carrying its little body.
It was clear that the wing was injured at its joint and lay useless by its left side.
He walked around the garden slowly holding the little creature aloft.
And he talked very quietly to the injured being trying to reassure it.
For five hours they meandered from tree to tree in a circular perambulation.

'My friend, you wish to fly south with your friends above – waiting for many like you.
Where do you fly to, little swallow? Lebanon's mountains and valleys they towering over t'other?
Above Syria's blood soaked lands from whence innocent souls silently and invisibly rise daily?
The unHoly Land where Palestinian wings are clipt daily;
And innocent blood is shed where Jesus was born and now is forsaken again.
Egypt and Libya where human life is cheaper than yours, little pretty creature?'

Of do you fly further south to lands impoverished by wealth of and from them to others not of them?

Where innocence has been banned and freedom crushed by greed infested men?

Maybe you fly seeing nothing of what men can do but only what God can do

– so much He can do as I can see here just by looking at you – eyes coming from you.

No matter, for we mortals can never understand – I will be you and see only my flight.’

Suddenly, the little fellow stood up on weakened legs and hopped on to the fingertips clutching them for safety.

The head moved from side to side and looked around –

The feathered friend turned around still clutching the fingertips

And looked at his unwitting saviour whilst letting out several cheerful chirps repeated many times.

The happy bird tilted its head this way and that with each song uttered.

Occasionally, it fluttered its good wing and gently moved the injured one.

As time went by and the sun began to descend on its westward journey

The injured wing moved a little more vigorously

Raising his saviour’s hope that the swallow might fly by and by

Or, perhaps, as it gained strength, it might join its mates somewhere above.

As darkness fell, he placed the injured bird in a small birdhouse pinned to a tree.

He added some mashed food, a few seeds and a small container of water.

He bid his new friend good night and retired into the dark recesses of his little home.

He walked with the habitual struggle; not noticing that his small indeterminate pains

Were diminishing and almost no more – sleeping that night a deep gentle sleep

And waking betimes at the first birdsong and determinedly drinking

A refreshing cup of tea – that cup of tea that constituted his first prayer of the new day

And, habit induced, stepped out into his garden to greet the trees and see his injured friend.

The birdhouse was empty – much of the food eaten and the water drunk –

Nowhere was the bird to be seen – nor heard at all...

He looked around and saw no birds – but felt a very light touch on his shoulder

And looked around to find his new friend sitting tilting its head this way and that

And chirping merrily as it fluttered one and then the other wing.

Clumsily, it took off and flew with a determined bent towards the weak wing

But it flew up, turned and made a slow sweep down to twirl about the garden and land again on the old man’s shoulder.

The chirping increased and became repetitious and pleased the man

Who heard in it a hymn of thanks for care given and love bestowed.

The bird landed on the edge of the birdhouse, sang again, looked at the man and fluttered its wings,

Before taking off at speed to disappear into the haze of the new sun.

The man sipped his tea, stretched his back a little, smiled broadly

And realised that the pain that he had but could not quite place had gone

Flown off into the ether leaving him invigorated and young at heart.

‘Goodbye sweet bird. Goodbye. May the angels fly with you

Higher and higher and, when your time comes, may they hold open the gates of heaven.

For now, thank you for healing my woes in healing yours –

But for you I would still wonder where that pain resides;

But me no buts, angle me no angles, square me no squares,

All's good with the world and I will take on whomsoever dares...'
He turned into the house, made two cups of tea and walked confidently up the stairs.
He entered the bedroom, placed the two cups of tea by the double bed,
Bent down, without ache, and gently kissed his wife's forehead.
As she opened her eyes, she saw her husband as on their wedding night half a century ago and he
 kissed her deeply on the mouth
And slid into their wide bed with an ease that surprised even him:
There were no aches in that marital room that day and no pain
Just the moans of ecstasy, lifelong love and mended wings.
And as the sun, its diurnal voyage did make, gently started sliding down behind the far spread sea
All eyes looked to one spot far far away and, just for a second or two, could see
An endless host of flying creatures gliding up and away
Into the red glare announcing the gentle end of yet another day...