

Leaving Home, Coming Home

Saturday, January 20th, 2024

©By Vijaya Sundaram

(A Bespoke Poem for CPC/CPA's Celebration on Sunday, January 21st, 2024)

Once, a robin in my yard
Fluttered onto the shelter
Of the front door lamp, set in the wall.
Hard work it was, to make a perch
Balanced on square lamp-top,
An invitation to fail, to flail, to fall.
But it held, stayed strong, a nest
Woven with unspoken certainty,
A song-call from millennia of bird-hood,
Made to weather storms,
A balm of feathering.
No predator could search this home,
So hidden away, cunning and calm.

Intent, intense, she made a home,
Filled it with grass, twigs, straw, fluff,
Odd bits and pieces, settled in,
Began her family.

Little Mother Robin, blind-driven,
Impulse-propelled, doing what she knew:
What told her where to settle?
How did she sense the safety
Of a human-made front-door lamp
Close to the ceiling, set against the wall,
And how did she deem it home
For her babies?

Mama Robin fed her young.
Her hatchlings nestled close,
Warm air cushioning them in
Her anxious, loving care.
Blind and squashed together,
They were a single, open mouth,
Pink, featherless, inchoate, bare.

Later, as nestlings they squalled,
Endlessly needy, always hungry,
Being fed, being watched over,

Mama Robin flying to and from the nest
Vigilant, alert, a protective cover

Then, inexplicably, yet
Easy as air, inevitable as day,
Hatchlings became fledglings,
Discernible, discerning eyes open,
Growing, sitting atop each other,
Pushing and settling, testing the air
With curious beaks, unseeing eyes
Seeing me with newborn newness.
I gazed up at them, ensnared,
Enthralled by baby birds learning
To become what they were made to be,
A humming, thrumming clutch
Of feathered life, yearning for flight.

A week later, two out of the three
Flexed their wings, tested the air,
Flew, like little summer leaf-flurries.
Blind and terrified, they zigzagged
Through the blue-gold air,
Landing like a surprise package
Tossed onto the ground,
By a passing messenger.

And then, hopping away, they
Tested the grass, the brick,
Tasted the air that lay heavy
On the ground, awaiting their arrival.

Earth-bound, yet skyward,
They separated from each other –
For that is the way it was, and will be.

The third remained, anxious,
Unsure, hesitant, deferring departure.
Mama Bird flew over, a last gift of food
In her stern beak, lovingly
Urged the baby bird,
Then, flew a little further away,
Calling for the baby.

The baby waited, faltered.
Fluttered, returned, altered course.

Then, decision made, spread its wings,
And sailed into the neighbor's yard.
As if a sudden, feathered-paper airplane
Had gained life, anima, volition, intention.
Flying, it landed on the neighbor's patio.

And, just like that, their nest was done,
Nothing remained, just a husk.
They would not come home again.

...

We make our homes from bits of fluff,
Things we pick up, things we earn,
Things that are given, things we learn
And things we make with wood and cloth,
And wire and iron.

We make our homes blind-driven,
Impulse-propelled, doing what we know,
Like Mother Robin.

Birds we are not,
Though, we leave our parents' nest.
Perhaps, some of us are trees,
Rooted, or wanting to be,
Spreading our branches,
Drawing life from the ground,
From the air around, from our kin
Through roots, and fungal follicles.
Giving each life and love, we begin
Our history in our homes.

Birds we are not, though
Some fly across continents
Others remain in the land of their ancestors,
Some travel from home to home,
Others find new lands to alight and build,
Saying, "I made it here, I'll never go back."

Home is where our hearts thrum
With the air in our rooms,
At one with walls and doors,
With windows and floors,
Curtains and couches,
Mattress, whether on fancy bed,

Or a thin spread on the floor.

Home is where our bodies, joyous
Or tired, hopeful, or sorrowful,
Come to rest, to sit and let in the silence
Or the sound of voices of the familiar
The voices of our loved ones.

Home is what we seek,
The hermit in the woods,
The awkward, the outcast, the ones
Who played the game of life,
Not knowing the rules.
The ones schooled in hard luck,
They, too, need their nest.

Home is where the aroma of coffee
Entices and satisfies,
The bursts of flowers at the windowsill
Soothe and distract from daily tasks,
The chatter of our children,
Remind us to live in the Now,
The music from the other room.
Settles or startles our jangled nerves,
The spices in the kitchen,
The curtains at the window,
And cushions on the couch,
The bookshelves lining the walls,
All spelling safety, home, shelter.

Home is where we find
Our people, our hearts.

They say we cannot go home again.
I say, we can – but if we don't,
We can make it, so our cities create
Pockets of warmth for her people,
Junctions of justice, chambers of certainty,
A refuge and a haven, where they, arriving,
Know they will be welcome.

Welcome home.
