

THE Stonebird

GOODLE BYRON

If the birds have their way

it will be them and not mankind who go off to live among the stars, but they have yet to devise the proper equipment for this voyage. Nevertheless, they have made it as far as the Crozet islands, which is almost as inhospitable as the planets they hope to one day colonize. Here it rains for three hundred days a year. Every tree that has hoped to grow here has been blown away by the constant winds tearing across the sea. Some grasses though have defied these storms and made a home for themselves over time. Seals of various kinds lay on the cold rocks as if blobs of gingerbread in an oven that will never warm. The killer whales and one other mammal, the man, reached the island on their own two feet so to speak. The man also brought with him a few select pets, the pig and the goat, which threatened to overrun the island briefly, so much so that one of these islands will always be scarred with the name 'pig island', a far cry from its beautifully named sister Ile de la Possession. We were able to remove the pigs thankfully, but the name will remain, as likely will the black rats we brought by mistake.

The name 'Ile de la Possession' can be translated as 'The Possession's Island' and should be so, if only so that possessions can finally have something of their own. It is also the second home of another creature who has had nothing but itself and the sky, the Wandering Albatross. Sailors have called them ghosts. These sailors vainly thought that they were the ghosts of themselves, of those who died at sea. The Wandering Albatross is not a human ghost though, but rather the ghost of the Not-Wandering Albatross, an ideal which was never born. These birds live their lives wandering through the sky over the water, traveling thousands of miles with nothing but the wind for company. Every child has dreamt of flying in such a way. The albatross likely dreams of a home, though it would not know what to do with one if it found it. The albatross is inseparable from the sky, for the albatross is the sky.

But of course there is one thing that can separate the sky from itself, which is the possibility of an enduring love. Every two years the albatross will touch down and try to find a wife or husband. Once it has found its love the bird will still return to the sky, but from then on every two years the two of them will be reunited on the island. They will land from the sky onto this desolate rock, filled with thousands of birds. They look through the king penguins, the goofy macaroni penguins, the petrels, the prions and the pigtails, none of which look anything like an albatross at all, and are readily distinguishable. It would be difficult for some people to tell the difference off hand between the albatrosses themselves for there are a few different species including our long wandering albatross as well as its cousins the sooty, grey headed, and light mantled albatross, all of which reunite here as well. But the differences between them are readily apparent to the wandering albatross, they look nothing at all alike, though they may have some difficulty telling the differ-

ence between you and myself. Even among the many birds of its own species littering the rock our albatross sees right through them as though they were gnats attempting to conceal the moon. She only sees her husband, the one whom she loves.

They were reunited at last. He apologized that he had brought her nothing from the sky.

"You are the only thing in the sky" she said.

For some time he was dumbfounded, he could not speak but only look away from her in awe. Whenever we are away from the ones we love there is a loneliness that grows and tarnishes our eyes, even when we see them again we do not see them until they do something to us, a gesture or a well placed word that breaks this fog and then we see them fully. Our albatross did not have another eloquent word to give him, she had taken some time this past year to think about what she would say when she saw him. She knew she had come up with something beautiful in June while flying over the Indian ocean. She had not yet thought of a second thing to say.

"Have you eaten anything?" he asked, and almost started off before she had a chance to answer, even though he had just come home to her after an interminable journey.

"No, but stay." She responded, and he stopped immediately. And her touch on his wing rooted the sky to the ground.

They are happy when together but not without misfortune, and as is often the case the happiness was their own doing, but the misfortune was the design of the fates. Our albatross is not able to conceive. Her husband does not know this, nor does she. There is no doctor who will confirm it, she will have to live with an immortal hope drowning in common sense suspicions. They have made her sad for a long time. She is also afraid of what might happen if she were to admit her suspicions openly. Realistically she is afraid that he might leave her, that he might be forced to leave and try to find someone else, that she would have to let him go, that she would not be able to blame him for leaving her. Unrealistically she is also afraid that saying so might make it true. These lesser suspicions are conjecture and they may or may not be true, but her first and principal fear was an actuality. She is even more barren than the island itself.

Our albatross is barren but she will conceive a child, by exploiting a play on words. Her child will be conceived as a concept. This has happened among mankind throughout history, but not among the birds. It is entirely new, though quite familiar. The two of them have done most all of this before; they have found an outcropping of rock overlooking the sea; they have set off to find moss and grasses; and they have built a nest before. But this year, our albatross sets an egg in the nest and sits down on it. She smiled as though she were proud. Before leaving to hunt for food, her husband nuzzled his beak into her neck. I will be back as soon as I can, he said. He paused for a moment and looked at her with pride. His pride was much more convincing, as her own was sullied by the knowledge that this egg was only a stone she had picked off the ground.

The stone was particularly smooth and particularly round, it was particularly beautiful in its own way, it was only ugly to her because it is a stone and not an egg, which was not its fault at all. After sitting on the stone for a moment she got off and examined it more thoroughly. It really looked like an egg and it was even the right color. This at least was a good fortune, because when she picked it up she had not thought it through very well. Most everything foolish is not thought through, as is also the case with most noble actions. This might have been either, but foolish actions do not give us strength, whereas noble women are said to lift boulders when the time is right. What else would explain how she was able to pick up such a large stone as though it were as light as eggshell. She had not thought about that at the time, she was only worried what would happen if she did not. She could not think about it now either, for she did not know it was a noble thing she had done, at this point it only looked foolish. She repositioned the stone so that she would be more comfortable and arranged some grass so that it would be warm. She hesitated a moment, and kissed the stone before sitting back down to brood.

As a species, the albatross has not thought through its breeding habits all that well, a number of foolish traditions have persisted throughout time. Every mother loves their child, but few of us would have been born if for such to happen our parents would have to sit day and night on a desolate arctic rock, facing the sea, whose bitter winds have torn away the trees and flick water into the faces of all who dare to be here. If a human being were born under these conditions, they would never live down the guilt of being born.

The two of them have built their nest facing the wind, as do all albatross. They face the wind so that they may fly. If they did not face this adversity at all times, if they had built their nest on the sheltered side of the island, they could never take off. But because they face the wind at all times and all the misery it brings along, in return the wind lifts them straight into the sky. This is an effective recipe for all who would do the same.

For the next sixty days, she and her husband would take turns sitting on the stone. He may have had his doubts at times, such a clever bird as ours could never marry an idiot. He may have noticed that the egg was particularly hard, or that its heat retention was a bit off. Like all things made of stone it would not warm quickly, nor would it cool quickly. Heavy things tend to move slowly and are not easily moved, nor are they easily stopped once they are committed to a course. The ruse was helped along most prominently by its difficulty. After a certain age we all come to feel that things that are difficult and entail much misery are quite real, we become distrustful of the reality of easy and pleasant things. Many difficult and miserable things were later shown to be quite false and many things that appeared pleasant and simple were later shown to be quite real, though often only in retrospect.

The husband felt that if the woman he loved asked him to sit on a rock facing all misery, she must have a very good reason to do so. After all she would have to bear it with him equally. It is perhaps this ability to divide their troubles into such clear and equal parts that makes the bonds



of the albatross so long lasting. She would sit on her throne until he returned with food for her, they would eat together and discuss names and different things they had thought of about the egg, or how this was changing their perspective on life, the distinct differences between the life of a stationary creature in a distinctly unpleasant place versus the life of a creature of the sky, with no place at all. Then the guard would change. She would slide off the rock and he would take her place. She would look back at him. Sometimes she would see a fool sitting on a mere stone, sometimes she did lose some respect for his intelligence, but she always fell further in love. Then she would leave and he would call her name, but the wind that had taken her would blow her name right back at him. He would then say it to the stone egg, the only thing that could hear him now.

All was well while the albatross sat on the stone, but once alone in the sky she was overcome. She fell from the sky and laid down on the waves. During their months apart at sea they would stop flying to rest upon the waves. She did not sleep though, her eyes stayed wide open and worried. She worried what would happen later on, when all the other eggs hatched. Why had she gotten herself into this position. Life teaches us to hide, to wait for the problems which face us in the present to fall behind and lose our trail. Often they are left in the past searching for us hopelessly while we have found safety in the future.

Unfortunately for her, the albatross' problems lie in wait for her there in the future, toward which she is being dragged every moment. Should she just push the rock into the sea and pretend a rat had attacked it, or that a wind had knocked it down? This was not an uncommon fate, but it felt cowardly and selfish. Her actions too seemed selfish to her, but they were only selfish in the good way; she did not want to be alone. She wanted to give the love she had to offer and she did not want her heart to waste. This can make us all do stupid things, even proceed forward toward an event of which we are terrified, all the while pretending as though nothing were wrong. She was terrified that he would leave. She worried that the stone would be uncovered at some point, and what would happen then? She would stare up, searching the sky for an answer. But he was the only thing in her sky.

At the end of worry, she would open her eyes and see the waves around her and not the one she loved. She would remember that he might be hungry or uncomfortable on the stone. She would pick herself up off the waves and go off in search of gifts to bring home to her husband and his stone.

It is easy to become lost within a deception, especially a beautiful one with elaborate detail. In an art gallery you may find people lost in flat paintings but you will find few people looking at the walls, which are also flat and painted. She came home to find him worried one day. A thought had evidently been weighing on him. Like a hand, a thought does not weigh much, it is light as the air, and yet it can also weigh more than anything if it cannot be put down.

If thoughts are strong enough and persist in time, thoughts can drive giants to the floor. His eyes now were white as clouds, though much heavier.

"Are you okay?" she asked.

"I haven't felt the egg move at all." he responded "is it breathing?"

She set her wing on his back. A moment came when she could have unburdened herself entirely. She looked at the ground and then at his eyes, which were sad. The moment passed.

"Here let me try to reposition it."

He got off the stone and she moved some of the grasses around the bottom, then she climbed on top and sat down. The two of them sat in silence for a long time, him looking at the stone and her at the sky. There are only worries to be seen anywhere. The water that would be tears lingered in their eyes, it did not form it did not fall, just clouded their eyes.

"Oh" She sighed and held up her wing.

"Is it okay?"

She sighed again.

"Yes, I think so."

He breathed deeply and bowed his head. One of them at least was relieved. He stayed for a while and he talked about how much better of a parent she was than himself.

"I just didn't know at all what to do." he said "But look at you, you knew immediately."

"I did the same thing as you." she said "You did the right thing."

"These things don't come naturally to men, I think women are born knowing languages that men have to learn by study."

"That's just rumor."

"That may be rumor, but it is rumored everywhere."

"We just need to make sure its warm and dry." She said "That is all we can do."

When the time came to leave he stayed. The tension had tied his wings in knots and he was reluctant to leave the nest. She would go hunting in his place. He agreed and climbed up on the stone. She said goodbye and turned to face the wind.

"It's okay, I think felt it move now too." He said "I will keep it warm and dry until you return."

"Please take care of yourself" She said "You are the only thing I have."

"You have the two of us now" he said "the egg and myself."

"An egg is just a rock that may one day be a bird." She said "but you are a bird now."

Her husband looked at her sweetly. He did not understand. He looked at this as being one of the many things she said that were correct but he knew he would never understand, which is itself a type of understanding.

A neighboring couple hatched a chick and then another. Albatross are solitary creatures chiefly, a strong second inclination is a romantic nature, which is a cousin of the solitary nature, to be two as one. However the birth of a child tends to draw even solitary creatures out of the woodwork. The chicks that were born will soon discolor and turn a dusty brown, but they are born as white and soft as snow, though warmer to the touch. Their work is far from over and the trials of the chicks themselves have only just begun. Nevertheless, there is a brief moment of relief for the birds. The whole world seems to stop except for the chick lifting its head up into the light. The wind seems still as the chick takes its first breath into its lungs, in and out. It is lovely but it is only a moment. Immediately they are hungry and exhausted from their struggle to hatch their egg. Having torn apart the home of their birth they are faced now with the cold wind their parents have faced on their behalf. They are colder now than they have ever been, and they seek the comfort of their parents and they are warmed. The birds are born white and discontent. They won't be white for very long.

We are all born at different times because we all differ in our eagerness to be born. Birds are no different. The first two or three were born early. More were born later on. Wandering Albatross eggs gestate for

roughly sixty to seventy days, and they were all conceived at different times. Neither of the birds mentioned their alarm. A creature that has such a spartan lifestyle has learned a thing or two about stoicism. It is always best to wait and see. They would discuss the chicks that they saw on their journeys from the nest. There was a distinct and subtle moment of recognition on the seventy second day.

"They are all very beautiful" he said "But it is a very difficult thing to be a chick, there are many dangers in learning to fly. It would be wrong of us to rush the egg if it is not ready to be born."

"What if it is not born?" she asked

"We would try again after we have flown the world again and become more wise."

"You won't leave me?"

"We are migratory" he said "I will leave you, but I will always return."

"What if we can't do it?"

"Then we will try forever, and fail forever, and, in doing so, succeed."

They agreed to wait another ten days for the stone to hatch. Understandably the more realistic party, she had to talk him down from a thousand days. It was likely he took such a strong position only to impress her, neither of them would survive the year if they stayed. The Crozet Islands are a brutal place now, but they can become moreso. The act of rearing a chick is also so exhausting that the recovery from the ensuing weight loss takes over a year. They are both pretending to be much stronger than they are, in order to help the other stay strong. Their hearts are not exhausted in metaphor, but their real hearts cannot take much more of this.

She left and returned to him, he left and returned to her over the next few days. On the dawn of the eighth day a storm had raged on the sea. When he returned to the nest they looked at each other with mutual love, mutual grief and mutual exhaustion.

"We don't have to wait until the tenth day" he said "We should just quit now and find some shelter."

She did not know how to respond. It was a thing that they had feared and envisioned with all the blurred and tragic colors with which the mind's eye sees the future. Like all things it was quite less grand in the now, seen with the other two eyes, which tend to see things in a more practical light.

"It is only a rock" she said, and looked away. "I suppose I could get away without telling you, but I don't want to."

He walked over to the cliff and looked out at the sea.

"I think I've known that for a while." he said "I'm not sure. I was afraid to say what I thought. It does look like a rock" he said "but on the other hand it is an egg. An egg is just a rock that could be a bird one day. I did think it was a rock on occasion, but I also hoped that I was just being pessimistic. You treated it so much like an egg and it looked like a rock to me, I did not want to break your heart by saying so."

"I lied to you" she said "I don't know why I did now."

"I lied to me too" he said "I swear that I could feel it move"

She would have said perhaps 'I never felt it move', or 'I never got to feel it move', but depending on the speed of her words their accuracy would have been very brief. It was right then she felt a small but distinct jostle against her chest and then another. She quieted herself and tried to ignore the sensation. But then there was another peck at her side, then another.

"I feel it move now." she said

The look of severity on her face relayed what she could not speak. Words are well designed for every day use, they are good for asking the time or to get a tall man to reach a glass on a high shelf, but as such they are often found wanting on the day that is not everyday. Words nor photographs can relay what a mountaineer sees from the peak, or when the spelunker perceives total darkness. Such things really have to be seen to be understood. This situation was even more extraordinary. A brown head broke through into the world and looked out at the light for the first time. It paused and looked out at the sky before pushing further out into the world. It looked



up at the albatross overtop of it. Something happened then which is called imprinting in ornithology. With the exception of the unfortunate platypus, all mammals are given a great gift by evolution, which is that we know our mother before we even exist. Even once we reach maturity we will never know something else quite so definitively. A bird unfortunately must sit in relative isolation for some time before knowing the touch of another. In exchange for this, they are given a moment of great freedom. The first light passes into their eyes and an indissoluble bond is formed in an instant; they choose their mother with their first glance.

She was shocked and really did not know what to do. The small creature nuzzled into her feathers. She dropped her wing over it but withdrew in shock. The small bird was visible to the world now.

"It is an egg! We were wrong."

She dropped her wing over it and warmed the creature underneath her. They looked much the same as any other mother bird and her chick. To one who may read the facial expressions of birds though, there was a distinct smear of shock on her face that also contained an undertone that in English is best described by the term 'crestfallen'.

"Is something wrong?" asked her husband

"Our bird is made of stone."

Any taxonomist could understand the difficulty of the situation. A bird has a kingdom, a phylum, class and order, a family a genus and a species. A stone ordinarily is just a stone, is not born and has nothing. But this is the possession's island, where mere things get the privileges of ownership. It is not much ownership, this stone still has no kingdom, but it has a family at least, and a good family is more than many kings have. It knows its mother and it learns its father quickly. It acts like a bird, though it eats less often than would an ordinary chick. It even bears a resemblance to its parents.

Chicks ordinarily are very talkative, if not eloquent, but the stone bird did not speak at all. It was laconic by nature, more so than any Spartan that is not a statue. It was however quite expressive. When the stone bird was hungry it would reach up and touch its parents gently. They would look into its eyes and

see that it was hungry. If it was tired they would see it in these same eyes, they spoke perfectly. We humans blabber, we waste ten words in search of one. All the while we tend to forget that to speak perfectly is to speak without a single word.

The incubation of the egg is an arduous process for the albatross, it continues even once it is over. Until three weeks of age, a chick cannot thermoregulate, it is not strong enough to withstand the cold on its own. If both of its parents were away at once it would freeze. Though the parents have lost much weight and are more ragged and weary than ever, they must maintain their vigil for twenty days. The fat on a body hides hunger and cold, once the fat is gone it becomes readily apparent. The father sighed deeply on the tenth day while he brooded the chick underneath him. He said the name of a diety that birds once believed in, sadly and with longing for the end of his hunger. In response he felt something move underneath him. The stone bird pushed its way out from underneath him and waddled forward. He cast his wing forward over the chick and tried to keep it back.

"Please don't" he said "You will catch cold."

The stone bird was firm and refused to sit underneath him for the next hour. Instead it just looked at him then out at the sea and back. It touched him and pointed at the sun. At first he tried to understand what the stone bird meant by this gesture. Pointing at the sun as though it were a thing of great interest.

When the mother flew into view, she saw that the chick had gotten out and flew quickly to the nest.

"What are you doing" she said sternly "It will get cold."

"I think it is mad" he said "I cursed and now it won't go back underneath me."

She looked down and touched the chick gently. It did not look mad at all. It pointed at the sun.

"I think it wants you to go" she said "That must be why it is pointing"

"Is it mad at me?" He asked "I did want to leave for a moment, I was terribly hungry. And then the chick came to the edge of the nest and pointed at the sky. I tried to get it back underneath me, but it refused"

"It wanted you to leave because you wanted to" she

said. "It must have been trying to show you that it did not need you, that you could leave."

"Won't it get cold?"

"All things get cold in the wind, so do you and I" she said "it is never pleasant, but it wanted to show you that it could endure the cold on your behalf."

It was a lovely way to put it, because in fact up until now it has been the two of them who have been enduring on behalf of the stone bird. They still did so, one will leave and one will stay usually, but they are able to relax a bit. The two of them have left together on a few occasions, leaving the stone bird alone. This happens to all. After three weeks all albatross lose the constant companionship of their parents, and they will have to fledge on their own. It is true that no one else can teach us to fly. We learn to fly in solitude because that is the only place from which we can fly. We can only fly from solitude. If this seems unfortunate, that is because we look at it through human eyes, which are far more needy and demanding than those of an albatross, and far far more needy than the eyes of a stone.

The stone bird cannot yet fly, alone it must wait for the end of its solitude, for its parents to return home. Anyone who has waited can know that waiting itself can be harder than anything, despite its simplicity. The stone bird is kept company by a natural curiosity. It looks out at the world from the ledge on a cliff in the sea. The world it sees is much more bland than our own. There are two flat expanses of blue, in the sky there is the white splashes of cloud, in the sea there is the white water as the cresting waves reach toward their cousins in the sky, and crash down. It is a repetitious scene, but the stone bird's expression remains very curious and interested in what it is observing. It has seen the killer whales that come and go, and it has heard the calls of the birds all around it. When the winds blow it does not close its eyes, it does not blink when looking at the sun. It waits and searches the sky for something. The stone bird only closes its eyes to sleep beside its parents.

Three weeks have come and gone. The tradition among the birds holds that now is the time of fledging, the greatest and defining trial in a bird's life. In many senses the stone bird has not yet been born. A bird is not born when it hatches, but when it flies. Among humans we face a trial of sorts once we reach the brink of maturity, the age at which they say we must step forward to become a full being. Humans are creatures of symbols. Our trials are symbolic and the title of 'adult' is also merely symbolic. Many of us will always remain children and those of us who are adults were likely born as such. Symbolic differences can be as real as war. The difference between two armies are often only the symbols on the flags. Birds however are not symbolic creatures, their trial is in flying. You fly or not, if you cannot fly it is difficult to be a bird for very long. You stand on a cliff. The sky is above you, the sea beneath. It is a very simple problem that only some are able to solve. It will take a long time for any bird to fledge, its whole being must change. Ordinarily for this species it will take nearly a year before the chick is ready, but the problem it faces is clear now. Humans too will one day behold the problem of our lives, by looking inward to the symbols floating inside us, looking for their proper order. We will see our problems before we are able to solve them, like the albatross chick on the rock, who is not ready to fly. All we can do is keep aware of the simplicity of the solution, and grow into the man or woman or bird that can enact it.

For now the chicks can only feed and grow. The stone bird grows as well. Though it never molted it changed colors as would a bird. Its feathers change, but they remain stone. No two birds have ever loved a stone so selflessly, they bestowed so many gifts upon it. The gifts of mankind are many and varied, but the gifts of birds are the squid and fish they find on their hunts. The preferred diet of a stone has never been deciphered, but the stone bird ate whatever they gave it, if only because it was accepting a gift.

Stone does not ordinarily eat, but stone does not or-





dinarily grow. The stone bird grew and grew, its feathers changed.

The stone bird's mother, by her sensitive nature, could read its eyes as though they were in a language she was born knowing. With this ability they could have entire conversations. She would find the stone bird looking out at the stars in the sky and say 'no those are not birds at all, though I don't know what they are.' Once she saw it looking down at the orcas, the killer whales, who were riding out to sea on red waves, a trail of blood they left behind them.

"I hate them too." she said "But remember, what I bring you I also hunted and I have also killed to live as well. However I believe I do it more reverently. It is a small difference, but the only one possible."

The stone bird's father long believed that a stone was an egg, or at least he thought so. Such naivete readily lent itself to forming a bond of a different nature. Though they both fed the stone bird, it was the father who would also feed it with his peculiar dreams, which were similarly half-digested.

"You grow so fast. When you fly over the world, the whole world will fall in your shadow. You will fly to Paris with me and we will eat inside a restaurant. We will wear a disguise and they will not know that they are serving birds. Their best chef will cook for us whatever we want. And when the time comes to pay we will fly away." He paused a moment before amending the story. "Not because we are thieves mind you, but because we are birds. Flying is really all we can do in response to anything."

Time passes as the time comes. Time is short and the time is growing near. Finally the time has arrived. On rare occasions one can still catch sight of the ominous killer whales in the sea, but the sky now holds their miraculous counterpart; the flight of the fledglings. These flights are always brief, never far from the nest. At first they only leave the nest by a few vertical inches. They let their wings out into the air and the sky takes them. Overwhelmed and unprepared for their full task, they shut their wings and the wind drops them. The stone bird has seen the fledglings reach out into the sky and return. They are things of wonder.

They look so much like him up in the sky. They also are afraid of falling. The stone bird has wandered toward the edge of the cliff, but always startles and returns to the safety of the nest.

One day a cry shot out in the air. A fledgling was caught in the wind and carried off the cliffs above. Often such birds will never return.

"I'm very scared" called out the chick

The fledgling drifted down towards the ledge. The wind picked it up and tossed it between its hands. The bird landed by the ledge for a moment and the wind lost hold of her.

"Mother please come save me from the sky." she called out "Its taking me away."

The wind slowly brushed the fledgling towards the ledge. The stone bird waddled over and set its wings over top of her as the breeze came in. The stone feathers blocked the wind and the fledgling was kept from being swept away. The wind died down and the stone bird lifted its wings. It looked down at the fledgling for a moment. The fledgling lay there crying softly, looking away. She was terrified.

"Is there someone there?" she cried.

Her cry was so shrill and full of alarm that the stone bird startled and ran back over to the nest, where it laid down and hid. The fledgling lay on the rock for some time before it spoke.

"Is there someone there?" she cried

But she looked and saw no one, just lifeless rocks on the cliffside. The wind had eased, but only for a moment. She had only this moment to escape back up to the cliffs above. She stood and spread her wings. Though she was still afraid this is all she can do now. To watch a fledgling fly is to watch life hang in the air, which is where life hangs always, but most the time it cannot be seen. The wind has no emotions, it is not cruel. It did not want to hurt the small bird. Like fate, the wind is indifferent whether or not it hurt the bird. The wind can seem kind as well, such as now when it lifts the fledgling into the air and carries her up toward the safety of her home. The wind is not kind either, it has no qualities of life.

It was some days later that the stone bird's father awoke one night when he heard a rustling. He opened his eyes and saw the stone bird stand from the nest and walk over to the ledge. The wind blew softly off the sea. The stone bird sighed and looked at the ocean.

"Please go back to sleep son" said the father, "I do not like to see you so close to the edge."

The stone bird spread its wings. The yellow moon cast on the rock a faint shadow of a bird, but it was too dark to see. The shadow became more apparent at dawn, as the wind blew through the red and amber of the sunrise. By the middle of the next day, the shadow was unmistakable. It looked like an image of the mighty phoenix flying into legend.

The phoenix died with the sunset and was reborn again at dawn. Five days passed and then six. The bird's mother returned to the nest to find the father sitting and staring at his son. She joined them in the silence for a long while.

"It has been standing like that forever." said the father "The wind will not take it."

The both of them were unprepared for what happened next. It is impossible for stone to fly. To see a stone fly is something quite impossible, and has never been seen. But here a stone bird spreads its wings and it looks as though this impossibility might happen anyway. But it did not.

"The wind will not take me because I am afraid?" asked the stone bird

It is also impossible for a stone to speak. They had prepared themselves for the wrong impossibility, and were now caught off guard. A long moment held between them before the mother went over and draped her wings over her child. She was filled with grace and understood always what to do. She even somehow knew how to hatch a stone.

"The wind will not take you because you are stone." She said.

"That is what I was afraid of" said the stone bird.

She held the bird in her wings.

"You speak so well" said the father "how long have you known to speak?"

"I think I've known for a while" said the stone bird "I'm not sure. I was afraid to say what I thought."

"What did you think?" Asked the father.

"I did think that I was a stone on occasion, but I also hoped that I was just being pessimistic. You treated me

so much like a bird and I looked like a stone. I did not want to break your heart by saying so."

"May I ask you, do you know why you hatched?" asked the father. "I do not know, she does not know, and you are the only other I have to ask."

"I do not know why I was born." said the stone bird "I'd hoped it would be to fly."

"You were born because we would love you" said the mother. She was always so prescient.

The albatrosses must migrate each year, they must gain back the weight they have lost. They must wander the sky and grow stronger. They must recover from their attempt to raise a fledgling, which can be a heart rending and exhausting process. They must leave and they must return here, it is their only law. This has one exception, which is quite implausible; an albatross would not migrate if it were made of stone.

They continued on as a family for much longer than they could, even food became scarce, their family continued on love alone. Until the day came to speak the obvious.

"You two will have to leave me here."

"We cannot leave you." said the father

"We are different, you and I" said the stone bird "I will have to be left behind, but you both must go. All the rest of the parents have gone. The chicks that could fly have gone on as well."

"What will happen to you?"

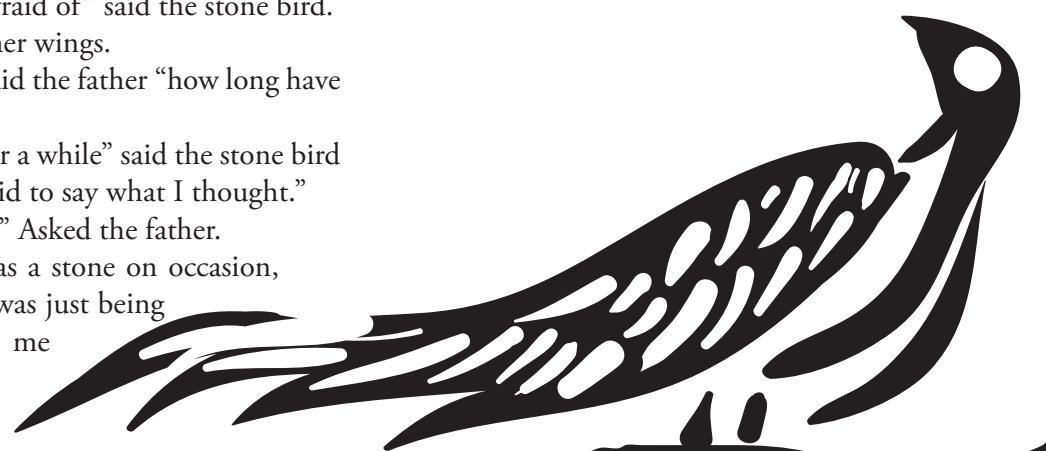
"I am one of the chicks that could not fly." said the stone bird "There were others as well. I will stay behind among the ones who fell, though I did not fall either."

It was a sad but necessary parting. Before they left, his mother held him, while his father went and gathered as many fish and krill as he could find. Once the nest was filled with food, his father gave him a hat weaved of grasses.

"I made you this hat so that your head won't grow cold." Said the father "I saw a man on a boat wearing this. I copied his design."

"I know you may get hungry." Said the mother "but if you can please try to save some for later. Just remember that there is a you in the future who may be hungry too and you have to share this with him."

The time to part came, as happens, they waited and parted later than they had planned. The stone bird was left alone on the ledge to wait for their return. They have done this always, it is only a little different. Whereas their earlier journeys might take them a day, or even eighteen days, they would not return to him for almost two years.



This is just the beginning! The adventures of the Stone Bird continue on from here for quite some time. In fact the book is some five hundred pages long, which is far too long for a newspaper. Anyone interested in reading more should write to the author, Goodloe Byron, who would be happy to give you an ebook or (fingers crossed) the scoop on the novels pending release.

send email inquiries to goodloeb@gmail.com



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