

Hummingbirds and Plastic Flowers

John Henry Carrozza

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by John Henry Carrozza

It seems as if the days now are laughing more loudly than ever before. Tree limbs are cracking the sky as if it were a windshield, sheathed in ice, reflecting paratrooping flakes of snow . . . it never used to snow this much in April before, says the dreamer to himself. Things are changing here.

Every afternoon brings a ballet of feathery clouds, drifting above or below, depending upon one's perspective. And the night. The afternoon is always preceded by the night. It comes quietly and cautiously, as if trying not to be noticed. The black of space brushes away the blue and white of day, sweeping it under the carpet of the sun, replacing it with a spangle of lights, like a vast city beneath a luminous fog. Often the dreamer plays connect-the-dots and then shakes the sky like an etch-a-sketch when he makes a mistake, each time trying to create a new constellation for the heavens to call their own. Each time he feels as if he has it just right, but . . . the face is never completed. He cannot remember it all at once, but only in pieces, and then he loses his place, or morning raps softly on the door, raising the horizon like a curtain and slipping the milk jars of daylight into the world, erasing his celestial painting.

He can remember certain things, like the sound of rain, which he calls upon whenever the water falls silently from the clouds, splashing above his eyes. He remembers the color of a sofa in the conservatory where they first made love. He remembers a painting in the home of his grandmother of a mill and a broken fence. He tries to remember many things which are now lost, which are only feelings now, with no image to recall them by - senses that seem more distant every day.

He tries to remember her face. He sees it vaguely in the shapes of clouds, the formations of migrating birds, in the stars. But never can it come completely to focus in his mind. He wonders if it ever will, as often as he wonders if his dream will ever end.

He remembers dreams. He remembers every dream he ever had as if he were dreaming them all simultaneously. But he cannot freeze the images as they hurry by, and he sometimes thinks he can see her there, but then she is gone, and he begins to wonder if she was only a dream as well.

An airplane inches its way across the sky, leaving a trail of vapors that seems to be pushing the craft to Denver, or New York, depending upon one's perspective. He envisions passengers on the plane, looking down, waving and holding a magazine, sipping from a plastic coffee mug and glancing at their neighbors, motioning for them to look out the window, but they do not, because they are asleep or busy with an electronic football game.

He remembers one Thanksgiving when his family was gathered at the table, and the lights flickered, and his father said it was a ghost, and he stayed up the rest of the night, listening for footsteps in his closet.

He remembers his favorite tree in the backyard, a maple, and how the branches were too uneven to build a treehouse upon, and how he would climb it instead and lean against the trunk and sit for hours, watching. He would see the grasses bow in allegiance to the wind, and the bees as they moved among the azaleas, and the hummingbirds hovering before the honeysuckle on the garden wall. He would go there to think, and most of all to dream. And he wonders if he dreaming now.

He remembers the time they first met. He was standing in line at the theater. He cannot remember the movie, but it was a blustery day and ... wait, he thinks ... it was *The Philadelphia Story*, and it was part of a weekly matinee series ... anyway, she was not at the movie house, but he picked up a brochure that said a woman would tell his fortune and read the lines of his palm, and he went there because he thought it would be interesting. The room was full of disheveled garments and smelled of incense, and the woman sat behind a crystal ball. She saw little of interest in the ball, or at least nothing which he can remember, and then she traced her finger along the lines of his palm and said he was going to live forever. He wondered for a moment if he should cancel his life insurance, and then thought better of it, thanked the woman and turned to leave. She had also said that he would soon meet the woman of his dreams, and that this would

cause great conflict in his life. He thought that perhaps it caused more conflict in his dreams, but nevertheless stepped out through a beaded doorway and told the woman in the waiting room, sitting in a green-cushioned chair, wearing a long, pleated skirt the color of lilacs topped by a white knitted sweater and holding a copy of *The Daily News* that he had been reading some minutes earlier, that she was next.

He almost recalls her face at this point, but instantly she is up and through the beads, and he is outside waiting for her to come out, because he believes in that instant when he looked at her that they had both fallen in love in their minds, and that his was probably a good omen.

He remembers thinking yes, it was a good omen, in fact a wonderful one, years later on a porch along some isolated stretch of shoreline on the east coast, as he was sitting on a step and listening to her footsteps as she walked easily up behind him, coming to sit down beside him and watch the waves crash in harmony with the hum of an approaching moon.

As the days drain away, he feels more and more for that which had been, for the waking world, for a glimpse of her face.

It is now the first day of May, and he sees a butterfly swoop down to hover above him for several wingbeats, fighting the wind. The insect flutters softly on and is followed by several dandelion seeds, propelled by the same wind, and loving it.

When they are past, the clouds slow like a carousel winding down, and the sound of bells rises and abates. The sky turns gold for a moment as the sun glares upon the foot of the dreamer's bed.

And then a shadow floats across the sky, as a figure steps slowly to his side. Her face is in her hands, and she carries a bouquet of flowers, which smell like a perfume he once cherished.

Quietly, she kneels above the dreamer and lays the flowers on his belly. For several long moments he can see her face, and she is crying.

That night, he traces the constellation perfectly, and he calls it Robyn, and he smells the flowers for several months and watches them wilt, until a man in a green cap takes them away and replaces them with a plastic arrangement, and he never forgets that face again.

