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"Nesting Dreams"

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by **David Breitkopf**

The bird had gotten into his room, and it circled continuously near the ceiling, faster and faster it seemed. He studied it from his pillow, marveling how it banked around the ceiling fan without losing speed, how it seemed to be not just a bird but a blur of bird, a rope of bird lassoing above him.

A cool breeze swept through the room. He turned his head and saw that the window was open with the muslin curtains fluttering roughly. He wanted to get up and shut the window, but the bird's rapid flight made that impossible. It was near the ceiling, but at times it swooped lower so he had no choice but to keep his head pressed to the pillow, praying that the bird would recognize the open window and dash out. But it kept whirring overhead as if trying to bore a hole in the air to escape through.

Then, almost casually, it alighted on a blade of the fan, which was switched off, causing the fan to rotate one revolution. He recognized the bird as a male finch with its red breast and head, the rest streaked brown. They were common in the area. With a defiant flutter, it dropped to the windowsill and chirped as though it had not just frantically searched for its escape. It didn't even sound out of breath. If he had run the same number of times around the room he would have been flat on his back gulping for air.

The bird chirped away. It seemed to be coming from its breast, which quivered with each sound. He tried chirping back, to speak its language. It came out quite naturally. And the bird rejoined with a few trills, which he replied to as well. He had come to some sort of agreement with the finch. He sat up, and the bird took two quick hops, and he reached out to grab it before it flew out the window, but was too late, and his sudden movement thrust him off the bed, and he fell onto the floor.

The fall woke him. He neither yelled nor cried, though he had fallen heavily on his side, and his head slammed the floor. It hurt, but the shock of the fall anesthetized him. He thought how such a fall would have sent him into a wailing fit when he was younger. But now the impulse wasn't there. Was he grown up? When had he cried last? He lounged on the floor, staring at the ceiling fan where the bird seemed to have flown around at top speed. It was so completely there just moments ago, whirling above him. How he pressed his head to the pillow, how he'd chirped with the bird, communicating.

He tried chirping again the way he had in the dream, but it sounded all wrong now. Still he could hear chirping. Dimly, he became aware that the chirping was coming from the window or was it inside the walls? He lifted himself off the floor sluggishly, and leaned his ear to the window. It seemed to be outside and in the wall at the same time. He slid the sash up, and pressed against the screen window glimpsing only a few crooked twigs.

He unlatched the screen window, pushed it up, and then slowly put his head



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through the opening sideways and peeked around. It was a nest sticking like stuffing out of the shutter. There was just enough room for an adult finch to stand above the mass of twigs and grass, and feed four pink heads, moving up and down like pistons, their mouths straining open, chirping for attention. The adult, which was all gray, placed its beak directly into one of the mouths of its young, and then removed it. The young mouth snapped shut and swallowed ravenously. The others seemed to chirp more frantically.

The birds ignored the large head looming nearby. He was mesmerized by his discovery. He'd never been this close to a family of birds before, and he wanted to stay here for hours and study them. The nest seemed so flimsy and precarious. He glanced down to see how far the drop would be—a good twenty to twenty-five feet—and while doing so noticed something pink lying on the driveway: another young, splayed and still. The competition was fierce and unforgiving.

After bending awkwardly through the window for nearly five minutes, his back began to ache. He started to pull his head back in, but a sudden flutter of wings brought another adult finch into the nest. It startled him. He jerked his head to avoid the bird, whose descent had brought it close to his face, and slammed into the window shattering the glass.

It woke him. His cheek was pressed to the pillow, the morning light pressing into his closed eyes. He touched his scalp to see if it was bleeding, but there was no pain, no blood. He heard a whirring sound above him, perhaps the ceiling fan, or was it the bird again? He was afraid to look. Then the bird seemed to chirp at him. He squeezed his eyes tight. He'd squeeze his ears shut if he could but he couldn't stop hearing the bird's demands. As long as he didn't actually see the bird it might still just be a dream, but that was the problem. What if it was a dream, still, trapped in a dream? He prayed to be awake, to escape through some hole in the air. He began to cry, even as he turned his head and opened his eyes: a cool breeze, through the shattered window, blew the curtains roughly.

David Breitkopf lives in Washington Heights and has been a journalist for many years. He presently teaches tennis. His fiction and poetry has been published online at Metazen, The Cynic, and the Cartier Street Review, among other publications.

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