

*Its time* I thought, *it is time to crack this darkness*. I knew it in my gut, I had to escape. Popping my beak against the top experimentally, I decided that I would need all of my strength. Summing what little an almost hatchling has, I thrust my short beak forward, making a small crack in the cramped darkness surrounding me. Throwing myself against the crack, I finally broke free of the egg. Light pierced into my tightly closed eyelids, shoving them open for the first time. I raised my head in awe. Above me was a huge female sparrow. She bent her head to mine and chirped soothingly. Relaxing my muscles, I took everything else in. I was in a round room, like my egg but with a flat floor. It had an opening with green stuff hanging over it. Just then I realized that the white stuff that I was laying on was not my egg shell, it was soft. I snuggled down in the white feathers and closed my eyes. In my sleep, I swear that I heard a gentle voice cooing, "Sleep well my Breeze. You are my beautiful chick..."

"Ahhh..." I breathed in the air of the wilderness. The warm breeze that was blowing ever so gently over the pond... it felt so good that I took a step closer to the edge, wanting to feel more. Now you have all heard the story of a bird falling out of the nest before it can fly, right?

"Mother!" I screamed as I madly flapped my short wings, trying to fly. I remembered what she always told me, *if you are to fall, be calm and just open your wings, you will glide*. I stretched my wings and breathed the cool air. I braced myself for the stab of twigs and rocks, but they never met my stomach. The warm air seemed to slow time around me as I flew upward, towards my nest.

"Breeze!" Mother cried "you are flying my girl, you are flying!"

I pumped my wings hard because they are so small. I shot towards the tree as fast as I knew. I started to panic, What if I crashed? What if I... But I did not have time for what ifs. Taking a deep breath, I calmed myself and stopped all movement of my wings. Gliding smoothly, I stretched out my claws ready to grasp the twigs of the nest. I grabbed the twigs all right, and fell on my face. It was not the best landing ever, but for the first one, it was pretty good. I felt proud of myself right then. *I can fly!* I thought happily, *I really can*.

“Breeze, get up sweetheart. It is time for the midnight meeting!” Mother gently poked my wing with her beak. I shook and looked at her blearily.

“Mother, do I have to go? It is so boring!” I wasn’t lying about it being boring. I mean, sitting at the top of Big Oak at midnight while some old hawks talked about problems - Boring.

“Honey, I heard that a new family of Chipped sparrows just moved in!” There was a hint of teasing humor in her voice. “I hear that they have a son about your age”

I puffed up my feathers in embarrassment. “Mother!” I cried.

My crest feathers must have been flared up because mother said “Breeze, it *is* about time that you get a mate before the long cold”. She opened her wings and flapped towards the Oak. I sighed and followed her out into the cold night.

At Big Oak, Mother and I were the first ones there, so we got front seats. Even worse, just as I was settling down and drifting off, another sparrow landed next to me. I assumed that he did that because we were supposed to sit next to birds of your species

“Hi there” the male said so suddenly that I almost jumped out of my feathers. “What’s your name? Mine’s Rocket.”

I studied Rocket. He was a little bigger than me, with grey wings and a brown body, like every other male chipped sparrow. The only differences were his long, skinny tail which he held low, and his crest. His crest (the feathers on top of our heads that we can make stand up when needed) was bright red with purple streaks that glowed when he moved. “Wow...” I whispered “I mean... My name’s Breeze” I blushed in the night. *I hope he didn’t see that!* I thought as Rocket bent his head and looked me in the eyes.

“Wow!” he cooed “you are as beautiful as you’re name!” Rocket moved a little closer to me and stretched a wing to my face. “Oh, um, sorry, but you are so pretty!”

I smiled as only a bird can and chirped, “That’s OK. You are a good looker yourself!” Before either of us could say more the Chief hawk, Lithean, called.

“Silence! The meeting will start!” He raised a wing, “We have a problem to discuss with you all tonight”.

I stifled a yawn and looked at Rocket. He mouthed, *is this boring?* I nodded. We both looked back at Lithean, who was staring blindly at Rocket. “You the new chick?” he said in his gravelly voice. Rocket nodded and Lithean continued to tell of the problem. “The humans are not putting out enough bird seed to feed us through the winter!” Lithean’s old, creaky wings opened in exasperation. The crowd of birds gasped. “We will need to send a small bird into the human’s monster house to get us more. Yes, it is dangerous, but it is our only choice.” He coughed and looked toward Rocket and I, “any volunteers?” No bird moved a wing.

No bird chirped, except Rocket, who said, “I will go in.”

I put my wing on his and chirped, “Are you sure? You could be killed!”

He looked at me pleadingly. “You are going to come, right?” He touched his forehead to mine, and that is when disaster struck.

Mother screeched and leapt between us, facing Rocket, wings flared, and her eyes on fire. “No Chick of mine is going in there!” she chirped with such ferocity that Rocket’s mom shoved Rocket aside and faced Mother. Both sparrows had looks that could kill.

Rocket flew over to me and grasped my claws in his. “Come up here, to these branches!” he whispered. “This is going to get nasty!” We flew up to the next set of branches.

Our mothers had lifted off of their branch and were circling each other. Suddenly, Mother darted forward, slashing Rocket’s mom in the belly, killing her. Blood gushed from the wound. Rocket’s mother fell, wings folded and eyes glazed over.

“Oh my!” I chirped and shut my eyes. I felt the rush of wings next to me, and then a scream.

“Mother!” Rocket cried. Before he could fly down after her, I grabbed his wing in my beak, dragging him back to the branch.

“Stop, my mother will kill you!” I screamed over the chirps of all the birds in the forest. He looked at me with such sadness that I stretched my wings around him and we sat there on the branch. I watched my mother gloat about her win. “I never knew that Mother would turn into such a killer” I whispered. And just then, Rocket and I watching our mothers, one dead, one changed, began to cry.

We flew west, out of the forest in which I had been born in. Rocket and I had left about one in the morning, after all of the other birds had dispersed back to their nests. Both of us had been almost too happy to get away from the place, the horrible clearing where our mothers had landed in disaster. Every day that we flew, the air grew cooler until one night when we were flying in the worst blizzard that I ever saw (and the first). Rocket flew over me to try to protect me from the stinging needles of the snow. We beat our wings against the wind, but it was no use. The snow swirled around us, trying to tear off our wings.

“Rocket, where you?” I screeched. I was concentrating on pumping my wings, just staying in the air made my muscles scream.

“Over here” he said weakly. I flew in the direction of his chirp. Just then, the wind calmed for a split second. A weather window opened and I caught a glimpse of a cliff of rock.

“Rocket!” I flew up next to him, “over there!” I tried to point with my wing. I realized that it was a little too heavy... I looked over at it. “Rocket” I screamed. “Our wings! They are freezing!” Rocket flew even closer as we pumped our snow covered wings harder than ever. We flew into a dark cave in the cliff that I had not seen. We were flying with such speed that we crashed into the back wall before we could stop. We fell to the floor in exhaustion.

“Are you OK, Breeze?” Rocket asked gently. He began to wrap his wings around me.

“Yes, I’m all right,” I whispered. “And you Rocket, you don’t sound too good.” His voice as strained and his breathing was shallow.

“Yes, I’m OK” and Rocket fell asleep in a heap on the cave floor.

“Yes, Rocket, sleep. Sleep is what you need.” I chirped to him as I fell into a deep sleep in a dark cave, with Rocket. The next morning, I woke to find myself freezing cold, and alone. I was alone. No Rocket, no bird in sight. Suddenly a whoosh of wings brought me to my senses.

“Rocket!” I cried excitedly. Rocket landed next to me, in his beak were a few scraps of human food. He set them down at my feet and chirped happily. “Sorry, I didn’t catch that” I teased.

“He said, I have brought food ma’am”. We both cracked up until our stomachs hurt and we realized how hungry we were from a night of flying in a snow storm. We gobbled down the human food, which, in fact was surprisingly tasty. We hopped to the cave entrance and looked out at the white landscape. And when I say white I mean *white*. Everywhere I looked, I saw white, with maybe a tree or so poking out of a sea of the pale color.

“Wow!” I chirped “this is amazing, but how do we know where we are?” Rocket raised his beak to the air. “What are you doing?” I asked as he turned it around slowly.

“I’m searching for a breeze,” was all he said.

“Well I’m right here” I chirped. I think that we stood out there for about fifteen heart beats. But I can tell what it is like being encased in a white box, nothing around you but white.

“Well...” Rocket finally concluded. “There is no wind at all. So, how about we start flying in that direction.” He pointed to our left wing side. I nodded and he took off, leaving our cave and the white sea behind us on a journey that would find us a home.

We flew until our wings and lungs ached. Up ahead a few thousand tiny wing beats; there was a thin strip of green that appeared to be a forest. “How about we settle down for a while and then keep moving” Rocket suggested. We flew to a tall, sheltered tree. It had plenty of leaves, and...

“What’s that sou-“I never got to finish. Monkeys flew at us from all sides.

“Fly!” Rocket chirped. I flew after him, the monkeys screeching behind us.

“Wow” I gasped. “I guess we’ll have to skip the rest.” We flew west, or so we thought, until I saw some tall rocks sticking out of the ground in front of us.

“What are those?” I asked in awe. They were not trees, not even wood. Noise came in a hum that never seemed to stop.

“It is called a city, my mother said.” Rocket explained, “Humans live there.” I saw them walking around the rocks and going into them through a passageway. Huge shiny things moved down the street faster than hawks.

“And those” I asked Rocket, pointing to the speedy objects.

“Cars, humans ride in them.” Then, a tall grey structure rose up in front of us. Birds of all kinds and sizes roosted on strings hanging between the grey towers.

“Rocket, can we rest on those?” I started to fly over to a string with a flock of red and brown birds on it.

“Hey, breeze, why don’t we land where there are no other birds?” He looked nervous, so I flew to an empty string. “I wanted to talk to you in private.” Rocket looked around to see if any bird was listening. “Well, I was thinking that, you know... we need to find a home for the rest of winter.” Rocket looked over his wing to the deep, wooded forest that stood about a thousand or so wing beats away from the city.

“So you want to find a tree in there?” I asked, wondering if it was safe. “There could be—oh, you went in there and scouted out a place!” I said excitedly when I noticed him trying to hide a smile.

“Yep, and it is pretty sheltered, next to another family of sparrows.” Rocket took off with me in tow, ready to see our new home.

The tree was a tall, white birch tree, with a thick trunk. The bark peeled off, making a good supplement for nest-making stuff. It was pure white, with little speckles of brown and red, like a barn owl’s wing, my mother had shown me a barn owl before, it was just like it.

“Wow...” I breathed, looking around at the beautiful landscape. The forest was peppered with bright snow- flowers, reds and greens and blues. The woods hummed with life. Vines hung from tall, droopy trees. Birds of more kinds that I have ever seen in the forest back home flew around, chirping to their mates. This place had a magical feel, almost as if we had flown into a fantasy.

Rocket landed in a large woodpecker made hole and chirped at me, snapping me back to reality.

“Over here, this knot- hole looks right.” I fluttered over and roosted beside him in the cavern. This one was a little smaller than my mother’s and mine back home, but it had a cozy, comfortable feeling of safety. The floor was littered with down, so we did not worry about making a nest.

Every night after that, we lighted down and pushed next to each other for warmth. The birds around here were the friendliest that we’ve met along our journey. I loved to tell the chicks about our adventure, they loved it. Rocket and I never had chicks of our own, to much work, he had said. But we often hatchling- sat for other bird couples while they went out or hunted, or were just tired. Rocket and I helped out as many neighbors as possible, and we are now called two birds of a feather in our clearing.

One warm, breezy night, Rocket did not return to the hollow. I had flown out and called his name, but I never heard a response. I did not worry, knowing that he probably had met a friend that he was staying with for a while. The next day, though I started to worry, Rocket did not show up anywhere. Nor did any bird see him that night. I called and waited for nights, weeks, and then months. I knew in my heart that I would never again see Rocket, but never the less, I kept at it. But to this very day, as you are hearing this from your parent sparrow, who heard it from theirs and so on, remember one thing. Until I, Breeze the sparrow, die, I will stay in this forest, and, even though my memory is growing dim, I *will* wait for my Rocket, until forever comes, I will wait.