

## Struggle

You could learn a lot watching sea birds. Especially if you used your imagination. How else would you recognize a look of frustration or dawning comprehension on the face of a sea gull without imagining it? And imagining something doesn't prove it isn't there, only that it can't be seen.

The old man lay back in his lawn chair a mile from the shore and looked up at the bird as it fought against the insurmountable odds of moving forward into a brisk breeze coming off the ocean. Thomas was reminded of similar binds in his long life, where he'd been unable to keep up with or push back against what came rushing at him daily. And although he had never flown through the air like a bird, he was able to imagine it, to let his soul fly alongside the young gull as a kind of encouragement. Thomas had no words of advice that in any case would have not been welcome, but he could offer

spiritual support, one could say, from one frustrated traveler to another.

The bird had strayed too far inland and was now poised over the land as he battled a stiff headwind. Struggling forward to the safety of the beach, the small creature clawed the air as it buffeted him backward and kept him from home, from his family and friends.

Thomas flew next to the bird in his imagination. He pushed relentlessly against the wind and made no more progress than his companion. He was tiring quickly.

When the bird could no longer move his exhausted wings, he slapped them back against his sides, nosed over and plummeted to earth, flaring out at the last moment to land hard in Thomas's back yard. He bounced on the grass and lay on his side.

Sitting in his chair on the grass, the old man had almost felt the jolt when they landed. Thomas's imaginary flight had been a brief but welcome change from the daily sameness of his life. He was no longer physically able get down to the shore, but sat behind his house in the late afternoon sun each day watching the birds and hoping for the smell of the sand and the ocean to drift his way.

The young bird stood up and flitted from the grass to a tree and then from limb to limb, frustration mounting in his heart as he hoped each new view of his surroundings would hold a solution to his plight.

Eventually the sun moved low on the horizon, the shadows lengthened. The bird couldn't fly in the dark, but he knew he mustn't stay on the ground through the coming hours of the night. Lizards, snakes or other vermin stood by to make a meal of him before the sun rose again. Out of frustration he jumped into the air to fly anywhere. He scolded himself to just get going and hope for the best. But the sea breeze blew him back each time he tried and he was afraid what little strength he had left would be sapped, leaving him weak in the face of whatever dangers might attack him before dawn.

Just before darkness fell, the bird rallied and again attempted to fly up into the unconquerable breeze. Thomas's aging eyes now noticed the bird was not young and slim, but rather old and frail.

The frightened bird was beside himself with anguish. He launched himself into the air with desperation. The old man released an audible sigh. He no longer wanted to imagine himself up in the air flying along with the old bird, feeling his terror. A young bird would overcome adversity. An old bird might not survive without a miracle. In Thomas's mind age made a difference. Age would lose the battle.

The bird gave up and settled back down on the grass. Thomas stayed in the yard. Rather than retire to the kitchen as usual to fix his supper, he remained near the bird to watch by the

light of an early moon. The man wished for a miracle, but believed they seldom happened.

The breeze off the ocean stopped. The night became soundless for a few seconds. The bird quickly launched himself up into the air one more time. Thomas was immediately at his side, at least in his mind. Suddenly, they both heard the breeze resume and their hearts sank. But the twice daily miracle had already taken place. The land cools faster than the depthless ocean each evening, causing the great masses of air to once again switch places, but this time in the opposite direction. As Thomas and the bird braced themselves to be slapped backward again, the air temperatures reached their tipping points. In the twinkling of an eye the sea breeze reversed itself.

The bird was caught by the land breeze and whisked ahead toward the beach in the strengthening moonlight. He had only to wait for the grace built into his world to rescue him.

The bird saw creation respond to his need that evening. Thomas saw a miracle. It's a miracle you might see as ordinary, but only if you never struggled with the impossible and wondered how you would ever find an answer.

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