

The Starling

By Saskia

As I walked down the path to the cemetery, a lonely tear ran down my face. It had been 2 years since my parents died but I still mourned their deaths. By now I had grown older and raised a family of my own, but in my heart, I knew I still belonged to them. My parents' graves looked old in the gloom of the afternoon, and I made sure to throw fresh flowers on the stone. I'd never taken my children to a cemetery, I felt that seeing all these names engraved into the plaque, could only cause sadness. I wondered if my parents were up there now, up in the sky, and in that moment, I wished I could be up there too, like I once was.

Back then. Back then, 26 years ago.

I sat on the shore of the beach watching my brother splash around in the waves. I burrowed my toes into the sand and sighed. I didn't like waves, I was always worried I would be swept out with them, leaving everything else behind. I thought this fear was reasonable, my grandma went to the beach one day and never returned. I could only imagine the waves had taken her. I missed her more than anything. She always told me stories of her adventures over the years, and I would spend hours asking questions. Suddenly my parents voice broke my thoughts. "Kyra, we are going soon, are you sure you don't want to go in the water?" I shook my head and turned away, I didn't want them to see me scared, I wanted to be strong and brave. I looked to the sky. Up there it seemed so peaceful and suddenly I wished I was up there too, among the birds. I blocked out all the other sounds and just stared, as if I were in a dream.

I imagined I was sitting on a cloud far, far away where none of my troubles existed. I stood up and as if I was made for this moment, I stepped off the cloud, and instead of falling I was flying. I was flying! This world was sanctuary, and in that moment, I felt like I *belonged*. Of course, this wasn't reality, I wasn't in the sky, but I felt as if I was. I could almost hear the bird songs, and smell the clouds, but most of all, see everything. The world looked so much more beautiful from above, and in that moment, I wished my grandma could see this. I wished I could show her. I wish she were here.

I landed on another cloud, next to a bird. He looked at me and I looked back. "Pity you can't talk to me." I said and turned away.

"I can talk!" He said back, almost sounding insulted. My eyes opened wide as I turned back to him. "A bird, talking! Now this is an experience I never thought I would witness. What type of bird are you?" I asked, but as soon as I asked it came to me. "A starling, of course!" "Yes, I am a starling, how do you know? And what are you? I have never seen anyone like you before." I looked at him surprised, but then I reconsidered. Of course, he wouldn't know. Where he came from, in the sky, no human existed.

"I am Kyra, a human. I doubt you would know what that is though. Below you, not in the sky, on land we live." I said a smile creeping onto my lips. "Oh, those things. Those humans, sorry. I know them. I am Goldwing, the leader of my clan. A pleasure to meet you, though how are you here?" He asked

I looked him in the eye and said, "I don't know." Goldwing looked at me confused and I felt embarrassed, a slight colour touching my cheeks. "Well, this isn't real, but I don't want it to end." He looked at me with a smile so bright I thought he might burst into flame. "Who says it isn't?"

I looked to the sky, the clouds, the birds and the world below. Then I too smiled. I took a deep breath then whispered. "No one." And I was right. Because even if I was dreaming, the dream was most certainly real. If I pulled out of it now, and I went back to the beach, I would remember it. I would make sure it would never fade.

He held out his left wing and flew gracefully off the cloud, gesturing for me to follow. I stood up, stepping off the cloud, and following my new friend, Goldwing.

Being in the air was better than anything I had ever felt before. When I was young, I thought that the best thing I could ever do was go to a theme park. Obviously, I was wrong. This was the most magnificent thing I had ever witnessed, and it probably would be for the rest of my life. Usually, if I saw something amazing, as soon as I got the chance, I would tell my grandma. Now, I had no one to tell. My brother, he simply wouldn't care. My parents would listen and smile, but they wouldn't understand how important it was to me. But my grandma would.

I would always spend time with her, almost every day. She lived in a small flat behind our house, though she came out often to eat and spend time with us. Her flat was small with only a bedroom in it, as she came to our house to cook. I could hardly imagine it would be a very nice home, but she said it was all she ever wanted. I knew that was not true. I knew that she had her secrets. One day, she told me she would tell me what she did in her life. I'm sure she would have, but time goes fast, and we only have one lifetime to live, and by the time she would be ready to tell, she would be long gone.

I looked up to see Goldwing, sitting on a cloud, looking impatient. "About time." He said, "You are slow at flying."

I looked at him, my eyebrows raised. "You expect me to be as fast as you, when you have been doing this for many years and this is what, my first time?" He looked up for a moment and then said. "Come now, look. There is something I want you to see."

With the wind in my hair, I allowed my wings to guide me to him. When I got to him, I stopped. I just stopped and stood there, frozen in time. What I saw was far better than anything I had ever set eyes on before. It was a rainbow. Though in the light, it shone gold. Goldwing looked at me and smiled. "Have you wondered how I got this name?" I looked back at him, realising what he was showing me. His left wing had a gold tip, and it shone, like all the light had been taken, and put into this one thing. I sat down, considering this.

"In our tradition, it is a great honour to be gifted with the golden mark. Only the leader of the clan is given it. Not ever in history has it been another, let alone a being that is not a bird. But today I will break that. Today I will give you that golden mark. Today I will change our law, for I think you deserve it after your loss."

"My loss?" I asked, sitting up suddenly.

"Your grandma." He said as if it were the simplest thing in the world.

"How do you know?"

"Us birds, we know many things, some things about humans even they themselves do not know. We keep quiet though, waiting until the right moment." He confirmed. I said nothing, I did not question him.

Goldwing lifted his right wing and stroked one strand of my hair. It immediately turned a light silver, then white, then turned a pure gold. I bowed my head. "Thank you." I

whispered. "You won't forget this, will you?" He asked.

I grinned. "Never. I will make sure this memory never fades." I answered "I need to go Kyra. I'm truly sorry. It was a pleasure meeting you." I smiled at him, making sure he understood how much I appreciated his efforts. "Goodbye Goldwing."

"Farewell Kyra. May thy hair glisten gold for eternity."

I blinked twice, examining my surroundings. My family was slowly leaving the beach waiting for me to follow. I stood up and ran to them, following their lead as we walked up the stairs to our car. I found myself, playing with my hair, and to my utter surprise, it shone in the sun, that unique colour, gold. Goldwing's gift had stayed, even through my dreams. I blinked, making sure I was not just seeing things. But it did not change. I held my hair to the sky.

"Thank you, Goldwing."

I looked up from the gravestone. There was one other thing I wanted to see today, one other grave. The grave of my grandmother. Her grave was over the other side of the cemetery. It was larger and older than the others and stood alone amongst the flowers.

Another tear slid down my cheek and onto her name. I loved my parents more than anything, and I would do anything to get them back. But I also loved my grandmother. My eyes filled with tears as I looked at her name. I wanted to do something to make her proud. I wanted her to know that I'm still here missing her. So, I pulled out that golden hair and let it fall to the ground, though to my surprise it stopped halfway, entwining itself around the first letter of her name. It stayed that way illuminated in bright golden light. I looked up to the sky and saw a starling flying above. I smiled. Maybe my grandma could see this. But I still wished she could be standing by my side this very moment. Just remember I still want you back. I'm still missing you.

I wish you were here.