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Liu and the bird

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The night, the moon came in the window, I was dreaming of Grandfather.

He was talking to me—his lips were forming my name, Liu—but I didn't hear what he said.



It wasn't yet daylight when I got up. I had decided to see Grandfather, on the other side of the mountains. I tied my things in a bundle and set off on my way. A star guided me.

After walking for a few hours, I came across a child on the bank of a river. He was drawing on the rocks with the burnt end of a stick.

I asked him which way to go. He told me to follow the river. And he gave me his stick.



The river led me to a forest.

I walked through it in the shade of the trees. The treetops swayed gently, murmuring my name: Li-u, Li-u, Li-u.



When I left the forest, I came to a crossroads. Should I go straight? Turn right? Left? I threw the stick that the child had given me into the air, and when it fell, the point showed me which way to take.



The path took me through fields.

By noontime, I was very hungry.

I passed a woman who had just gathered her rice.

She shared her meal with me and gave me a sheaf of rice.

I set off again on my way.

I saw a man at rest under a tree. He showed me a bird that was flying above the mountains and said I should follow it.

The mountains were so high! And the snow on them glittered like the sun!





When I reached the top of the mountain, the bird had disappeared, but it had left tracks in the snow, and a feather to show me the way.

My feet were frozen, but I kept walking.

On the other side of the mountain, the sun was shining. Near a thicket of bamboo, an old man was making himself a parasol.

"I recognize you," he said. "You are going to see your grandfather, aren't you?" And he showed me a shortcut through the fields.

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Finally, I could see Grandfather's house. He was sitting at his worktable, drawing. He was not surprised to see me.



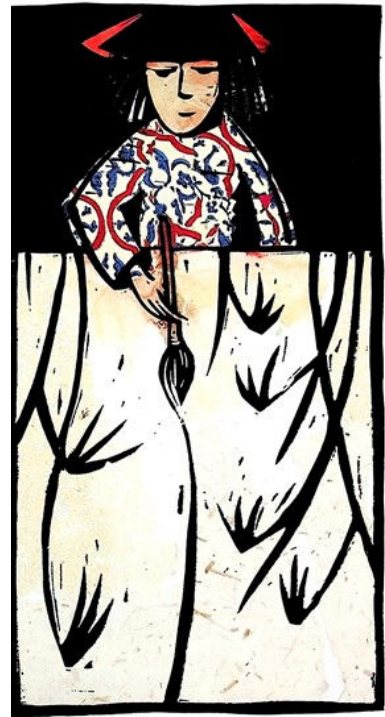
"I was waiting for you," he told me. "I knew you would hear my call. Because the voice of love can be heard from far away."

Grandfather gave me a paintbrush and asked me to tell him about my journey. Not with words, but with pictures. Not with my mouth, but with my hands.

I drew the child, the woman, the man under his tree, the old man in the bamboo thicket.

I drew the bird, too.

And suddenly, it flew off the page and disappeared into the countryside.



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Since that day, I continue to fill the garden of my dreams with birds.



Catherine Louis
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