



Like exiled thoughts

Adventure Book

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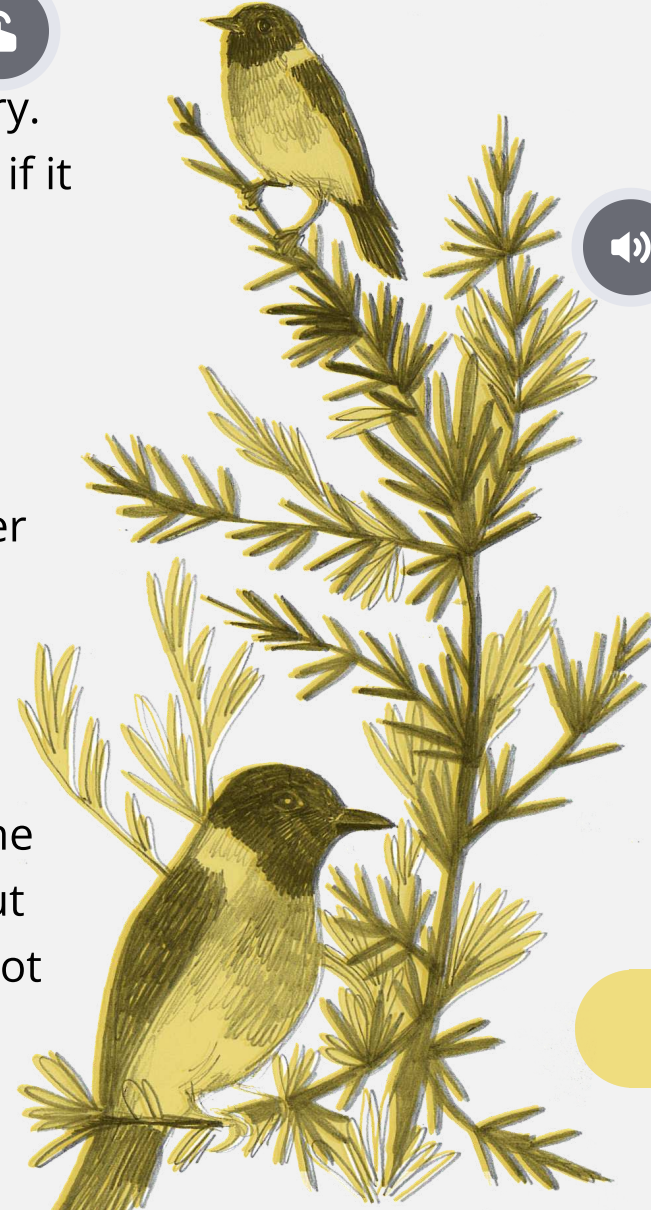


Chapter 1. Migratory Routes

In moments of discouragement, Flora would read poetry. She would open a book at random and read a poem as if it were an oracle. Pablo Neruda was one of her favourite poets.

Among them all, however, there was the poem about migratory birds. She had always loved it, even before becoming an ornithologist and before it took on another meaning for her, linked to the latest events in her life.

Like the Little Prince, she dreamed that a flock of birds would carry her away, not only from the place where she lived, where she thought she had never been happy, but above all from herself, from her body. A body she did not like because others did not like it.



CONTINUE

Ode To Bird Watching

Now Let's look for birds!
The tall iron branches in the forest,
The dense fertility on the ground.
The world is wet.
A dewdrop or raindrop shines,
a diminutive star among the leaves.
The morning time mother earth is cool.
The air is like a river which shakes the silence.
It smells of rosemary, of space and roots.
Overhead, a crazy song.
It's a bird.
How out of its throat smaller than a finger
can there fall the waters of its song?
Luminous ease! Invisible power torrent of music in the
leaves. Sacred conversations! Clean and fresh washed is
this day resounding like a green dulcimer.
I bury my shoes in the mud, jump over rivulets. A thorn bites
me and a gust of air like a crystal wave splits up inside my
chest.
Where are the birds? Maybe it was that rustling in the
foliage or that fleeting pellet of brown velvet or that
displaced perfume?



That leaf that let loose cinnamon smell - was that a bird.
That dust from an irritated magnolia or that fruit which fell
with a thump - was that a flight?
Oh, invisible little critters birds of the devil with their
ringing with their useless feathers.
I only want to caress them, to see them resplendent.
I don't want to see under glass the embalmed lightning. I
want to see them living. I want to touch their gloves of real
hide, which they never forget
in the branches and to converse with them sitting on my
shoulders although they may leave me like certain
statues undeservedly whitewashed. Impossible.
You can't touch them. You can hear them like a
heavenly rustle or movement. They converse with
precision. They repeat their observations.
They brag of how much they do.
They comment on everything that exists.
They learn certain sciences like hydrography.
and by a sure science they know where there are
harvests of grain
by Pablo Neruda
translated by Jodey Bateman © by owner. provided at no
charge for educational purposes neta

Over the years, they had called her every name imaginable: fat, whale, obese, chubby, plump, fatty... At first they were “only” words, whispered in her ear so as not to be heard, or muttered through clenched teeth while pretending to smile. Shouted from the other side of the street to draw attention to her. On her social media, beneath her photos.

Words repeated once, ten, a hundred, a thousand times. Heavy, cruel words, gratuitous insults, with the sole purpose of hurting and striking her. Then came the shoves and the blows, in the bathrooms and outside school. She hid the bruises, but she could not always hold back the tears. It seemed they fed on this, on her tears; the more she cried, the more vicious the insults and the blows became.

After school, she would hide in the park to listen to the birdsong, trying to spot the birds hidden among the branches and foliage of the trees. She could stay in the park for hours, feeling welcomed and protected.



CONTINUE



Leaning against the trunk of a tree, she would read, study, or simply remain in silence, listening: to the chirping and the distant chatter of children.

Summer was now just around the corner; only the oral exams remained to be taken. She was so immersed in her own thoughts that she had not noticed she had been followed by a small group in jeans and black T-shirts.

There were three of them, plus Cosimo, who stood a little way off and apart, as if he did not really want to be there. On other occasions too, he had kept to the side and at a distance, as if that were enough to make him feel uninvolved or less guilty, but he had never intervened to help her, never once stood up for her or told the others to stop.



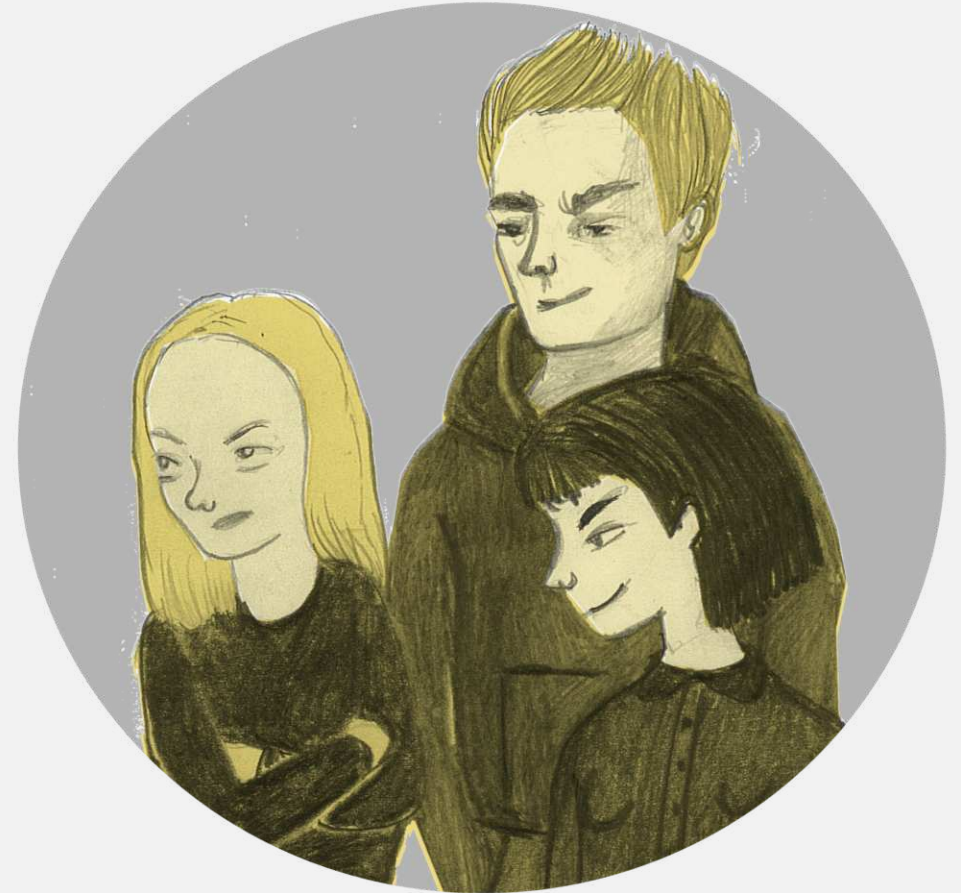
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Ginevra, the blonde girl from 5C, was standing in front of her. She kicked her with her boot.

“Let’s see if this ball of lard can roll.”

Flora got to her feet, in pain. Standing up, she was much taller than her and, without replying, pushed her away hard enough to make her fall to the ground. The others stood still and speechless, unable to decide what to do. That unexpected reaction had taken them by surprise, no one followed her, only Ginevra’s insults.

School ended, and with it the chances of running into them, yet after that last incident, they had limited themselves to giving her dirty looks or making the odd cutting remark from a distance.



CONTINUE



Flora had turned her body, her extra weight, into a shield. She no longer cried; she became deaf to the insults. She left behind the shapeless black clothes she had worn to try to hide and began to dare, to dress in colours, in clothes that highlighted her curves.

Some still defined her through the shape of her body, round and opulent, but she had become aware of herself, understanding that she was much more than that: she understood that she could not be defined by her kilos, but that it was her thoughts, her dreams, her actions, her knowledge and her learning that could describe the person she was.

At school, she had also been a swot, and that had not helped her make friends either; the path of solitude had seemed to her the best choice: the bullying she had endured had driven her away from everyone and made her focus on her studies.

CONTINUE

Three years of Biological Sciences and two years of a master's degree in Evolutionary Biology had made her one of the most highly regarded ornithologists.

After graduating and publishing a few papers, she had started working in one of the most beautiful wildlife reserves. A lake that had become a destination along the migratory routes of birds which, after crossing the Alps, continued towards the Sahara. Flora focused her studies on how climate change had affected the health and number of these animals.

Not only because it was her goal, but because she desired nothing else: she turned down invitations from her male and female colleagues, devoting herself exclusively to studying and analysing data, distancing herself from everything that frightened her: people and life. Early in the morning, she would go to the nets to collect the small creatures that had become trapped. She would gently take them to the laboratory to measure them, weigh them, and attach the small identification ring to each one.



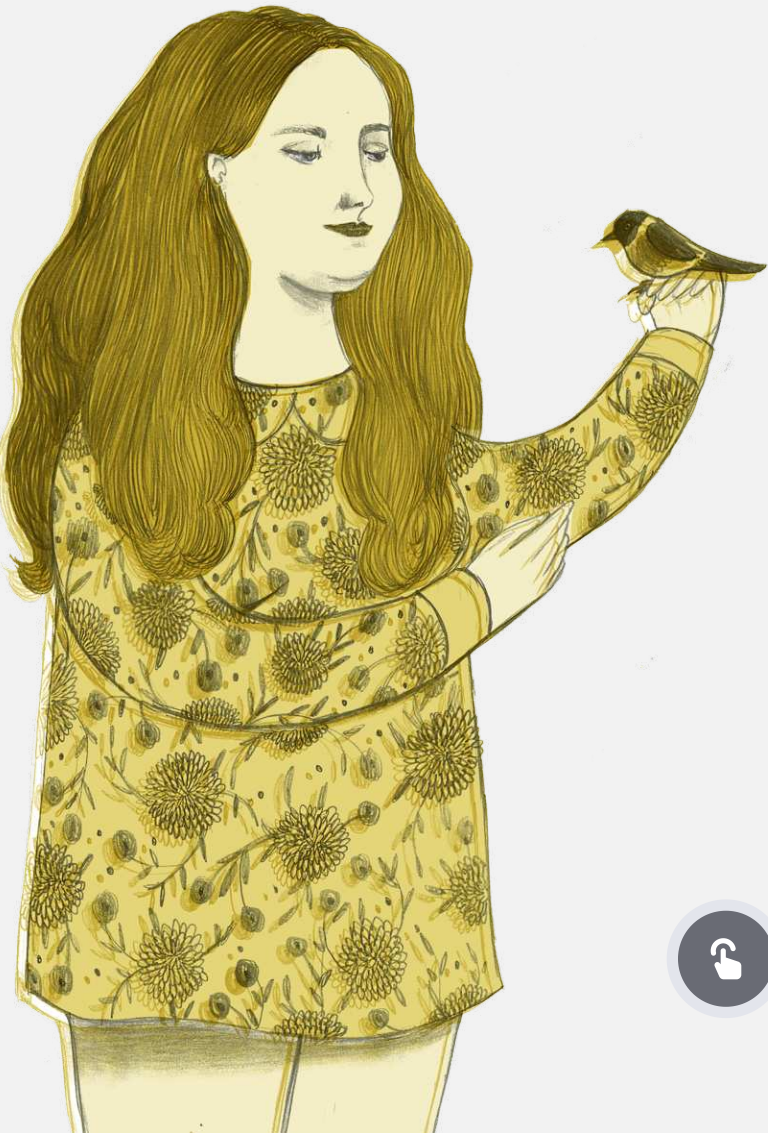
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Over the past thirty years, the decline in migratory bird populations in Europe and Italy has been dramatic, with an estimated reduction of more than 30% among species linked to agricultural environments. Rather than speaking of total extinctions, we might speak of a “silent spring”, marked by the drastic halving of many species as a result of several overlapping causes.

These include intensive agriculture, which makes extensive use of pesticides and other agrochemicals that eliminate the insects forming the basis of many birds’ diets; the use of pesticides more broadly; and the dramatic destruction of habitats such as hedgerows and meadows, which no longer allow birds to nest. Climate change also causes migrations to begin earlier, creating a mismatch between the time when chicks hatch and the availability of food. Hunting, both legal and illegal, has had an equally significant impact. Among the migratory species that have suffered the greatest declines are the Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*), with decreases of more than 50% in many areas due to the reduction of insects and nesting habitats; the Eurasian Skylark (*Alauda arvensis*), a typical farmland bird that has undergone a sharp demographic decline because of the lack of crop diversification; and the European Stonechat (*Saxicola rubicola*), which is declining due to the disappearance of patches of vegetation needed for nesting. Species such as sandpipers, Grey Plovers, plovers and Northern Lapwings have also declined globally by more than 30%, while Common Starlings and Grey Wagtails have suffered a sharp decrease over the past forty years.

The European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) is a long-distance migratory bird that is suffering from the loss of its habitat, as are the Eurasian Stone-curlew, the Lesser Kestrel and the Lesser Grey Shrike. These species are linked to steppe-like agricultural habitats, which are now extremely rare in Italy and therefore highly threatened. Hunting and poisoning, on the other hand, are among the main causes of death for species such as Griffon Vultures.



She would reassure them with kind words:

“It’s all right, just one more minute, everything’s fine...”

She would note down their name, sex, age and state of health in the migration atlas. But the moment that made her happy was the moment when she set them free. It seemed to her that they carried a little piece of her heart with them.

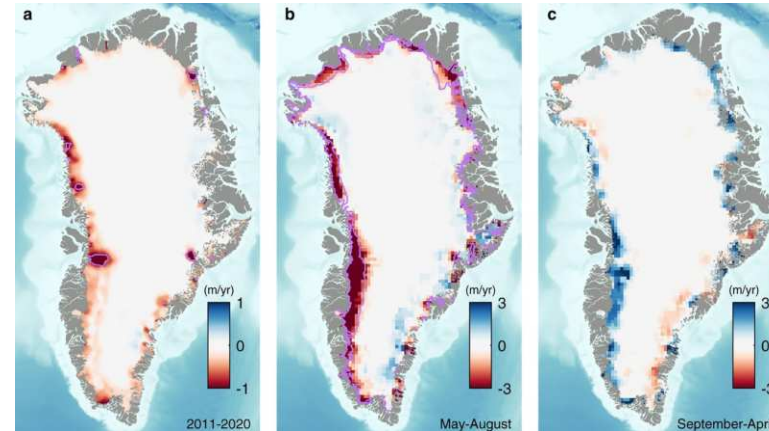
The data, however, were not reassuring the number was falling more and more each year. Then came summer, and the heat. A stifling heat, the air was so thick and humid you could swim in it. Greenland’s glaciers began to melt faster and shrink so drastically that what had long been predicted came to pass: new shipping routes opened up, along with new economic interests.



CONTINUE

The melting of Greenland's glaciers has multiple consequences for the climate. These include an increased risk of flooding, as shown by numerous studies published in scientific journals such as Nature Communications, which reports that over the last decade as much as 3.5 trillions tonnes of ice sheet have melted. This has not only raised ocean levels by one centimetre, but has also increased the risk of flooding worldwide.

The melting of this ice sheet could cause ocean levels to rise by approximately six metres. Over the past forty years, the rapid increase in temperatures and intense heatwaves have caused some glaciers to melt increasingly quickly and frequently, leading to a 21% increase in water runoff. One third of the glacier was lost during two of the hottest summers, in 2012 and 2019.



The melting of the ice sheet also has a negative impact on coastal marine ecosystems and regional ocean circulation. The image shows the different conditions between 2011 and 2020. The purple curves indicate the extent of the ice sheet's destruction.

For further information, see:

<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41467-021-26229-4>

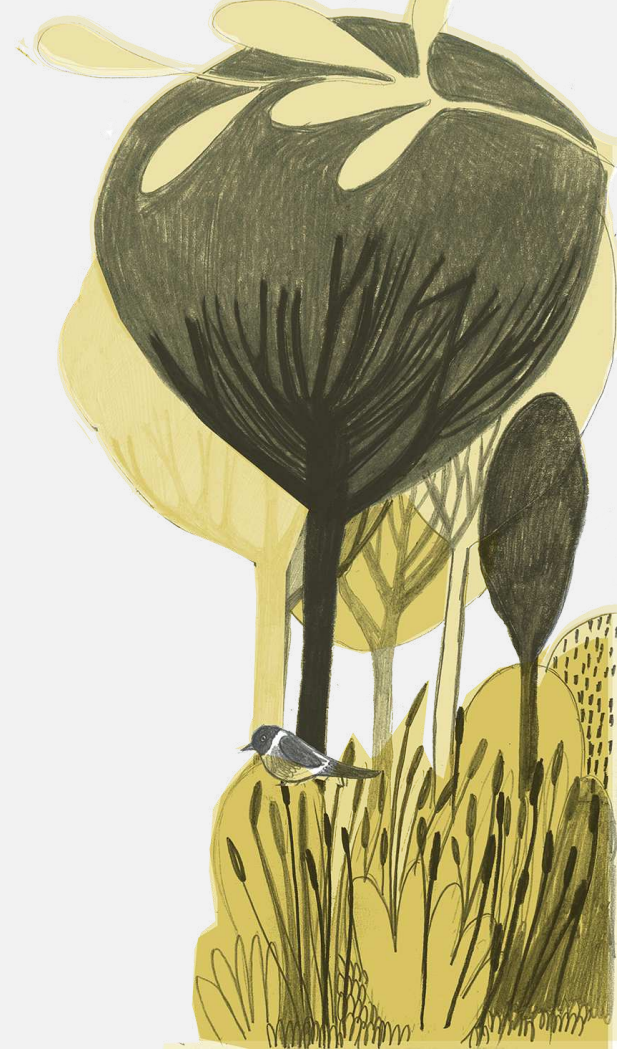


The consequences were not only the rise in deep waters released by the melting, but above all the increase in the albedo effect. With the melting, not only did sea levels rise, but temperatures did too, in a vicious and disastrous cycle that affected populations already hit by other calamities.



To counter these phenomena, numerous companies began to donate large sums to fund researchers and scientists in order to find even a partial solution, as if climate change had awakened consciences, even those of people who had never believed in climate change.

Thus, work such as Flora's, which had previously remained on the margins and had been seen only as the strange causes championed by some eccentric environmentalist, now received huge amounts of money for research and monitoring.

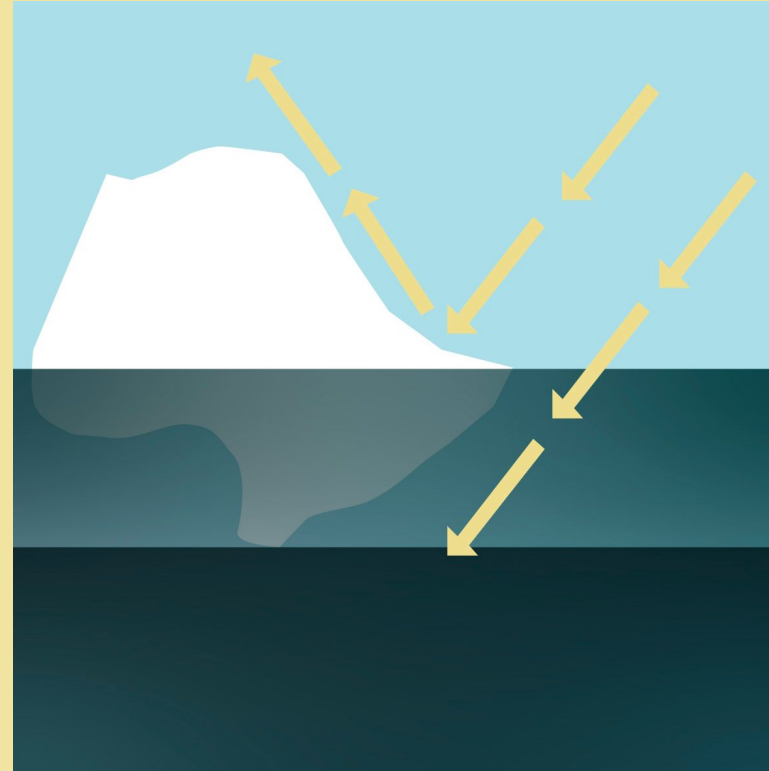


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Albedo is the ability of a surface to reflect sunlight, and it is extremely important for the Earth's energy balance. Its value ranges from 0 to 1.

The ocean, because of its deep waters, has a low albedo, which allows it to absorb more heat. Light-coloured surfaces, on the other hand, such as snow and ice, have a high albedo and reflect much more light. This is the case, for example, with the polar ice caps, which help keep temperatures low.

The melting of glaciers increases the surface area of oceans and of deep, dark waters, which absorb heat, causing temperatures to rise in a self-reinforcing vicious cycle.





The oasis stretched out around several bodies of water, surrounded by thick reed beds where the birds could find shelter. All around, the woodland had grown back to separate the oasis from the nearby crops and intensive livestock farms.

At first, Flora had found it illogical and somewhat inconsistent to make two such distant realities coexist: the care and protection of certain bird species, against the exploitation and death of others.

As if the kingfisher or the moorhen were more deserving of care and love than a hen or a chicken. However, as time went by, Flora had tried to shut these reflections out of her thoughts. As she did every day, seated at her desk, she was noting down the details of a little stonechat, whispering gentle, reassuring words to calm its frightened heart.

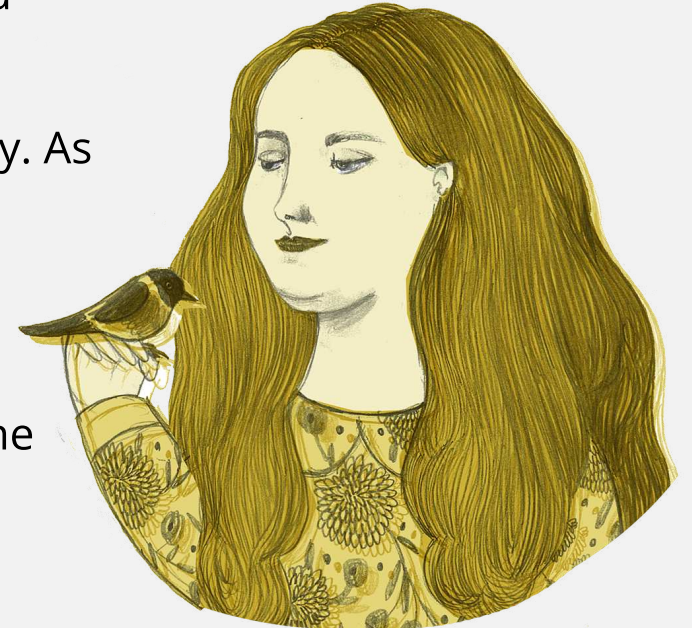
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Then someone came in.

“Let me introduce Dr Flora Dirondò, one of the leading experts. Her work here at the oasis is truly invaluable,” said the director of the oasis in a honeyed manner.

Then, turning to Flora: “Dr Genesio Sisifo, owner of the Cartagini company. As you know, one of our main funders.” Flora looked at them both without understanding, still absorbed in her little conversation with the bird. She snapped out of it and tried to reply:

“The chicken meat producer? You mean the companies that have been the subject of several reports on the conditions of animals...”



“That was a long time ago,” Sisifo interrupted her with a smile, stepping closer and invading Flora’s space as he continued: “Today our companies are at the cutting edge: animals raised without the use of antibiotics, reared in the open air, with the possibility of living happily...”

CONTINUE



The condition of chicken farms in Italy and around the world is devastating. The methods used in intensive farming are the cause of disease, as well as the “torture” of thousands of animals.

The data come from the 2024 ChickenTrack report by Compassion in World Farming (CIWF), which examines how much progress food companies are making in the field of animal welfare.

The stocking density to which animals are subjected in intensive farms is one of the many issues campaigners are asking to be reduced, along with stunning methods, which today still fail to respect these sentient beings.

Another cruel practice is the genetic alteration of animals so that their breasts grow rapidly and abnormally. This forces producers to slaughter the animals after only 35 to 40 days, in order to prevent them from dying, crushed by their own weight.

As a result, the animals suffer from myopathies, as well as burns under their feet caused by the poor hygiene and cleanliness of the places where they live.

In recent years, there have also been numerous cases of H5N1 avian influenza, as documented by several important journalistic investigations.

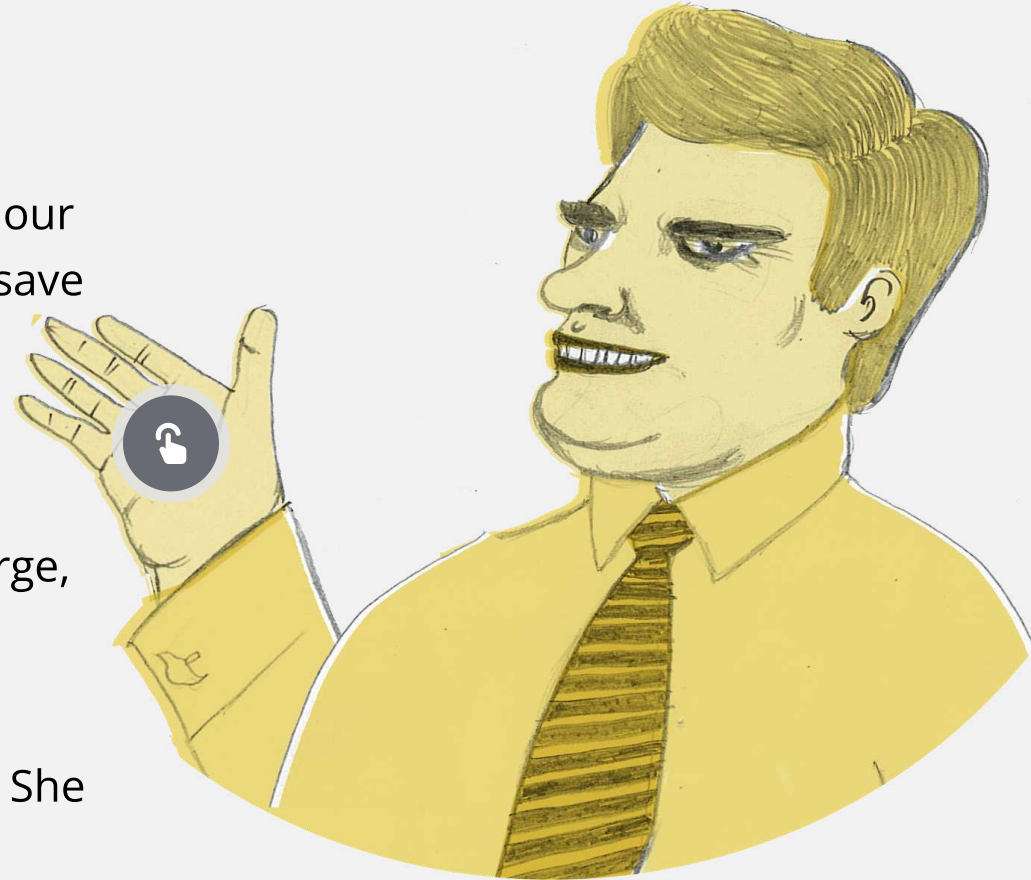
“Being raised to be eaten does not seem like anyone’s idea of happiness.”

The director of the oasis tried to silence her with a look.

“Believe me, they are perfectly fine. You may come and visit our facility at any time. Besides, our work helps fund yours and save species far more endangered than chickens and hens,” said Sisifo, still smiling.

It was a perfect smile, with whitened teeth all the same size, preventing him from closing his lips, stretching across his large, broad face.

The director and Sisifo left, leaving Flora alone. She felt disoriented, with a sense of unease she could not shake off. She opened the window and released the little stonechat, even though she had not ringed it and had forgotten to weigh it.



CONTINUE



Chapter 2. What if the oasis were only a mirage?

Hidden among the reeds of the ponds, she was searching for the water rail. She had identified its nests and could hear its unmistakable call. The grey and brown colours that characterised it made it practically invisible among the dense shadows of the reed bed. Flora remained silent, grateful for those precious moments stolen from nature.

Then a soft whispering caught her attention. Concealed in the reed bed were not only the water rail and the little bittern, but two colleagues. She could not see who they were.

"He had the nerve to come here, that worm."

"Do you think we should warn her?"

"She never talks to anyone. I have invited her many times, but she always finds excuses."

CONTINUE

“Maybe she’s shy. Maybe she thinks like them.”

“No, I’m certain she doesn’t. Believe it or not, I even liked her at first, but it really seems she doesn’t like anyone... apart from the animals in this oasis.”

“Anyway, I think we should warn her to be careful, because that disgusting bastard is a dangerous man. The kind who smiles at you and then stabs you in the back.”

Flora felt her unease growing and, without thinking, stood up, revealing her presence. The two of them fell silent.

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to listen to your conversation, but... I heard you were talking about me too. What is it I should know?” she said, still uneasy.

“You should know that the farms are real torture camps. The animals are treated terribly. A journalist friend of mine who works for television managed to get in and record videos showing the atrocities. Animals killed with gas, cases of avian flu, dead animals left there...”

CONTINUE

"Please don't go on... But what can I do?"

"The company uses the oasis for greenwashing, to clear its conscience. We want to join forces with my journalist friend and blow the whole thing wide open."

"You'll lose your jobs and the chance to protect our migratory birds, which are at risk of extinction..."

"Flora, we're not forcing you; you can choose. But even though you don't like us, we think you're nice and we appreciate your work!"

Flora blushed and lowered her gaze, mumbling a barely audible "I'm sorry".

"We just wanted to warn you, that's all. You can join us or you can stay. We won't judge you for it."

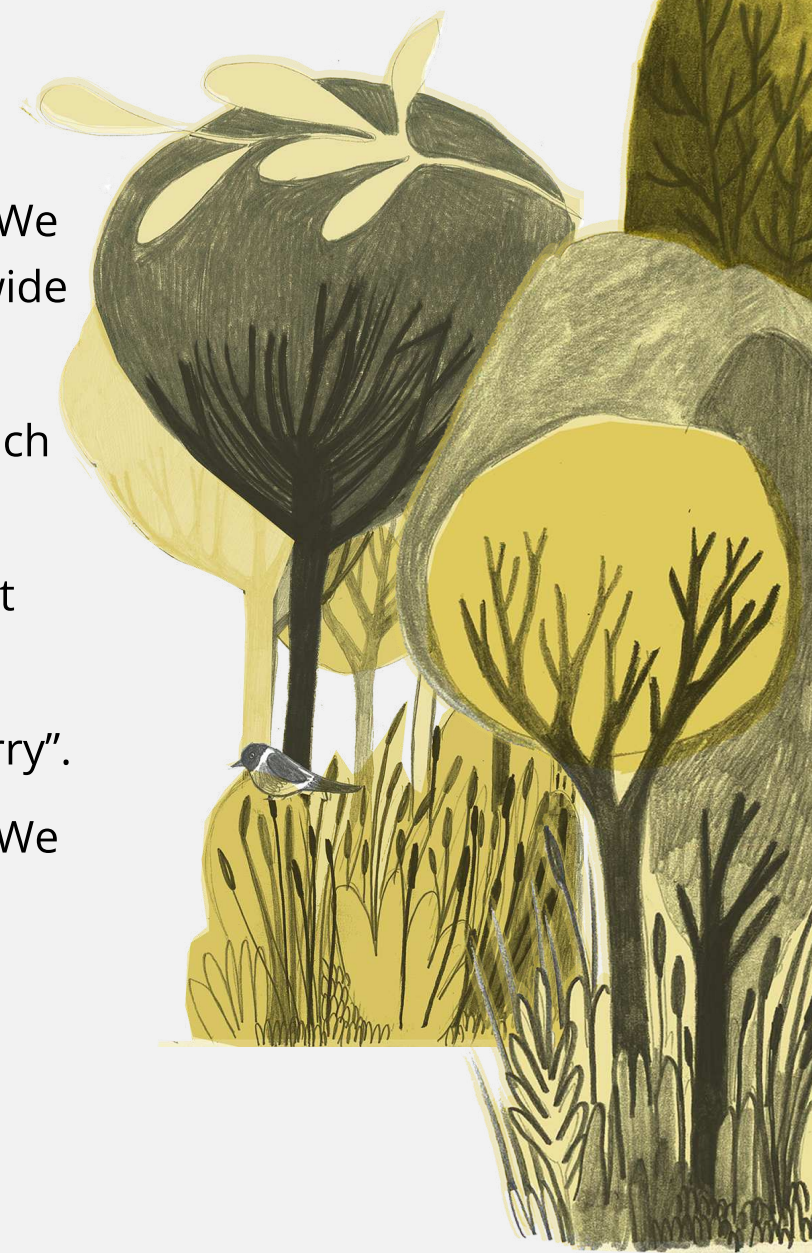
FLORA'S CHOICE



Flora decides to stay, considering the lives of migratory birds more important. Go to page 38



Flora leaves the company and joins the protest. Go to page 15



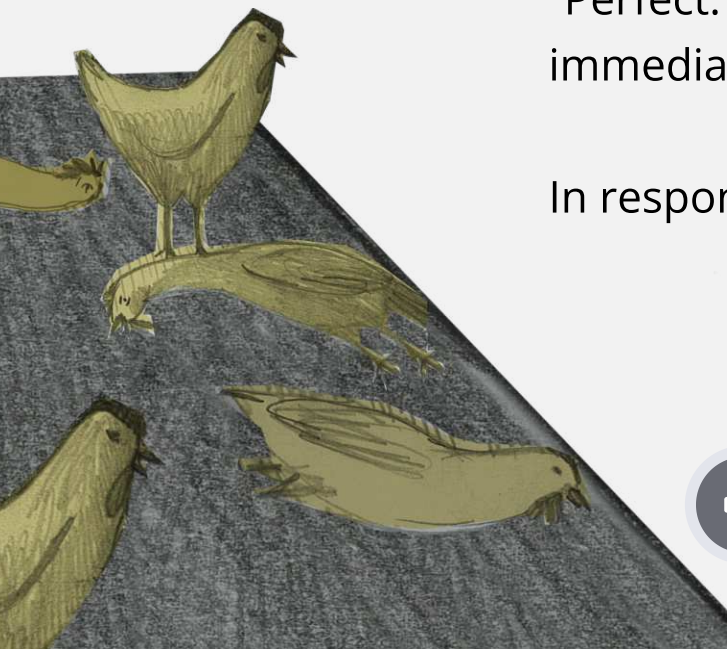
Chapter 3. A painful choice

On returning to the office, she looked on the noticeboard for her colleagues' phone number. She immediately wrote a message: "Sorry for running away; sometimes I can't control my emotions. Tell me what I have to do. I'm with you."

Flora stared at the phone screen, where the three dots were pulsing, signalling that her colleague was typing: "We're happy you're one of us; we had no doubts. My journalist friend wants to come here and do a report revealing the hidden truths. There'll be an uproar, you'll see. See you tomorrow."

"Perfect. Anyway, it's not true that I don't like you," Flora wrote, sending it immediately, before she could have second thoughts.

In response, a winking smiley face appeared on her screen.



CONTINUE



Flora went to the meeting wearing a black tracksuit. Her colleagues and the journalist were waiting for her and had her get into the car. After the introductions, they placed a phone in her hand, where a video filmed inside the farm was playing. Flora let out a cry of pain and horror, handing the phone back as if it were burning.

"I'm sorry, we wanted you to understand that what is happening is truly frightening. I had to see even worse things. Although the work you do at the oasis is valuable, perhaps it is not worth the lives of all these animals," the journalist said to her.

CONTINUE

Flora lowered her gaze.

“You must know,” the journalist continued, “that intensive farms, all of them, are also the cause of death for migratory birds, because they contribute to climate change.”



Flora looked at her, unable to say anything. She could only feel the tears running down her cheeks and someone’s hand gently stroking her shoulder to comfort her.

“We have all been through it: first there is pain, then anger, then the need to do something. One step at a time. We are bringing more and more people to awareness.”

Flora allowed herself to be interviewed and followed the journalist into the farm, without closing her eyes. The report would be broadcast in the weekend episode; that same day, she handed in her resignation.

Leaving the oasis was like leaving the “nest”, a protected place where she had hidden herself, and now instead she had to reinvent herself.

CONTINUE



According to the **FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization** of the United Nations, livestock supply chains are responsible for around 14.5% of global human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, mainly due to feed production, enteric fermentation, manure management and land-use change.

That evening, at the headquarters of the environmental association, she had met other people. As if they had known her forever, they had hugged her, kissed her, complimented her and teased her after her colleague had said that she talked to feathered creatures, and because she had gone to the meeting dressed in black as if she were a thief. But it had all felt natural; she had felt at ease, with the others and with herself.

Along with the wine and cold pizza, leaflets were also being passed around for the demonstration that would march from the city centre to the entrance of the farms. She put one in her pocket, smiling at other smiling faces, young and not so young, moving around her.

“So what do you think you’ll do? Are you coming to the demonstration or not?” someone asked her briskly.

Flora turned her still untouched glass of wine in her hands.

FLORA’S CHOICE



Flora decides not to go to the demonstration. Go to page 45



Flora decides to take part in the demonstration. Go to page 19

Chapter 4. Demonstrating

The next day, she dressed carefully and made her way to the town centre, where she found herself before a large, diverse crowd made up of children, men and women of all ages, colourful and peaceful, with banners and megaphones for shouting slogans. The procession set off, filling the streets of the city. Flora felt happy and, for the first time, part of something. They had been marching for an hour, leaving the houses behind them as they made their way towards the countryside and the oasis. "I've run out of water in my bottle; I'm going to fill it at the drinking fountain before carrying on," she said, breaking away from the group.

Someone bumped into her.

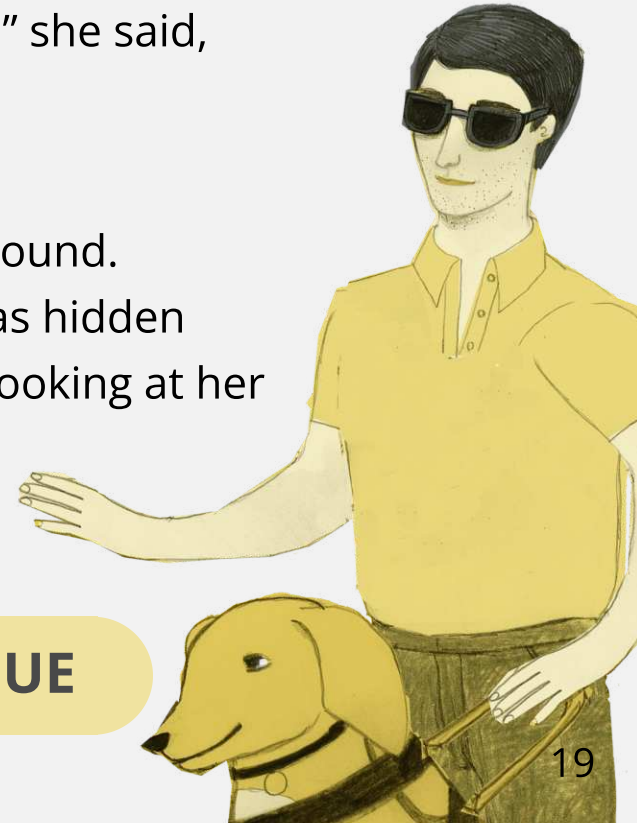
"Hey, are you blind? Watch where you're going!" she said before even turning around.

Flora's face turned beet-red. The boy in front of her really was blind; his gaze was hidden behind large dark glasses, and beside him was a golden retriever in a harness, looking at her and wagging its tail, before answering her with a bark.

Flora mumbled an apology:

"I'm sorry, I'm really sorry, I don't know how to apologise, I was rude."

CONTINUE



"Don't worry, it's not your fault I'm blind. But what saddens me is that you didn't see me: because I'm gorgeous!" he said, smiling.
It was then that the memory struck her. Behind those black glasses was Cosimo.
"Cosimo?" she asked.

"Yes, it's me, and you're Flora."

"How do you know... oh yes, you felt my fat body bump into you!"

"No, it's because of your voice; I'd recognise it among thousands. Although at school I could only hear it when you were called on in class, you never spoke to anyone."

"I'd rather not talk about school."

"Yes, no, actually... I wanted to apologise for never defending you."

"Listen, no problem, it was a long time ago and I don't care anymore. And besides, maybe now that you've become blind and need other people, you're forced to be good."

She said it and immediately regretted it.



CONTINUE

Cosimo replied: "You're right, it might seem that way. But losing my sight has taught me to see better, more deeply, into others and into myself. Just as the Little Prince said, one sees clearly only with the heart. Sorry, now that I've said it, I feel stupid. Usually, though, it works when I'm trying to charm someone," he added, trying to hide his embarrassment."... The Little Prince is my favourite book." Cosimo continued persuasively, though he could not hide a slight tremor in his voice: "Really, Flora, I wanted to apologise to you a thousand times, but you had disappeared and I didn't know where to find you. I would like another chance. And anyway, what do you want to do, bully a poor blind man? Exclude me because I'm different?"

Flora fidgeted restlessly. "Can I touch your face? I'd like to 'see' you," Cosimo asked.



CONTINUE

"Absolutely not! I don't want that," she replied, laughing nervously.

"Let yourself be looked at..."

Cosimo reached out his hands and found her face; he caressed it, tracing her features with his fingers.

"You are just as I remembered you."

"Fat?"

"No, soft, welcoming, beautiful."

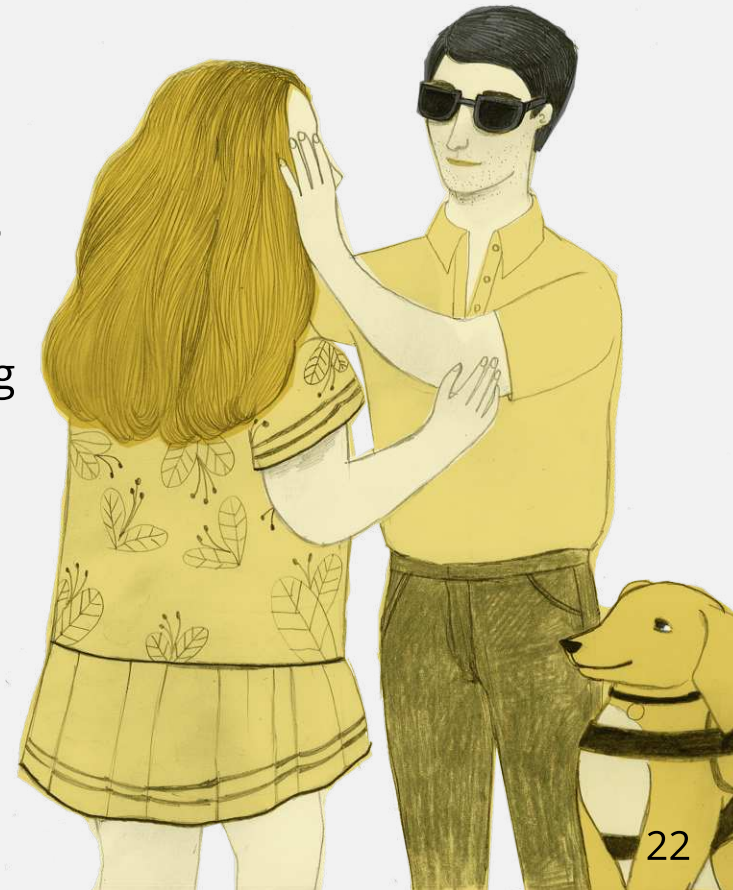
"Beautiful?"

"Do you want to contradict a poor blind man?" he asked ironically. "And me? What am I like? Am I not the coolest blind man in the world?"

Meanwhile, the group was moving away. Cosimo took her arm, gently urging her forward, while Osvaldo, the dog, whimpered happily.

"Shall we continue the march together?"

"Of course," Flora replied, holding Cosimo's arm.



CONTINUE

Chapter 5. A new job

After the march, they had continued to see each other, and their friendship was slowly turning into something that frightened Flora. Cosimo worked as a paediatrician for an NGO.

“In a way, we have many things in common: you work with migratory birds and I work with... migrant children,” Cosimo said to her one evening over dinner.

“Since you are out of work, you could work with us. You have the right qualities, you speak excellent English...”

“I don’t know, people frighten me. After the demonstration and what I saw, I want to keep fighting for the closure of those places of torture,” Flora confessed.

“The two things do not exclude each other. I think you should try. I’ll wait for you tomorrow at our headquarters.”

FLORA’S CHOICE



Flora accepts the invitation. Go to page 24



Flora is hesitant. Go to page 48



Chapter 6. Little Birds

After the first few days, when she had felt uncomfortable, she had slowly begun to feel involved and increasingly motivated.

The work was not all that different; only the subjects changed: instead of little birds, there were people, but for the rest it was the same. She had to write down their details, reassure them in a gentle voice that everything would be all right, that things would work out, hoping that they would soon be “free” to begin a new life.

CONTINUE



The lines of Neruda's poem often came back to her:

"...the ceaseless river of birds flies. One appears, a lost point in the open space of the mists: behind it go the silent cohorts, the mass of feathers, the trembling triangle running above the cold ocean, the sacred human throng, throbbing, the arrow of the migratory ship."

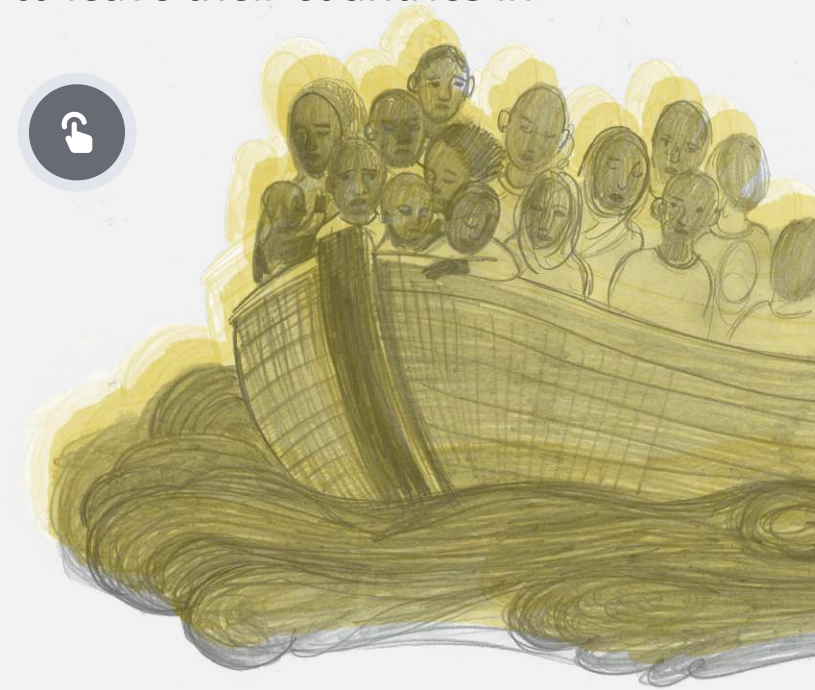
Only now, for her, they had another meaning. That sacred human throng of people disembarking every day, with hollowed faces, sad and empty, frightened eyes. Their hearts beating fast like those of her little birds in the net. The mass of their bodies crammed into the ships, at the mercy of the sea and the waves.

CONTINUE

Absorbed as she was by her own life, by the upheavals and changes that had taken place, she had barely thought anymore about what had happened the previous summer: the extreme heat, Greenland's melted ice, the death of many animal species and the agony of others, the desertification that was increasingly taking hold of African lands beyond, and the people forced to leave their countries in search of a place where they could survive.

As she noted down the names, ages and genders of the people filing past her, as she listened to their painful stories and dried their tears, she thought of all this. Then there had been yet another shipwreck. The sea had returned only lifeless bodies. Those of many children too.

The words of the poem echoed inside her: "The corpses of seabirds fell onto the sand, small black bundles enclosed by burnished wings like coffins fashioned in the sky."



CONTINUE



Climate migration is one of the most urgent challenges we are facing, with millions of people forced to leave their countries because of the impacts of climate change.

Extreme changes such as floods, prolonged droughts, rising sea levels and other extreme weather events pose a serious threat to the safety and sustainability of communities around the world, as well as to human health.

According to data from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), in 2017 around 18.8 million people in 135 countries were forced to leave their place of origin because of sudden-onset natural disasters. Between 2008 and 2016, approximately 227.6 million people were internally displaced in response to natural disasters.

The World Bank's forecasts for the coming years are dramatic. The Groundswell report reveals that, across all regions by 2050, Sub-Saharan Africa could see up to 86 million internal climate migrants; East Asia and the Pacific, 49 million; South Asia, 40 million; North Africa, 19 million; Latin America, 17 million; and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 5 million.

Overall, more than 216 million people could be displaced within their own countries by 2050.

Sources: Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre - <https://www.internal-displacement.org/>

World Bank, Groundswell report.



The hottest summer on record had not only contributed to melting the ice in Greenland, but had also, as a consequence, altered atmospheric circulation patterns, further accelerating desertification in equatorial areas, with rising temperatures and increasingly prolonged periods of drought. The inhabitants of those territories had no choice but to leave.

However, since that summer five years earlier, southern Italy too had begun to suffer the dramatic consequences of the change triggered by the melting of the ice.

Farmers were in increasing difficulty because of the lack of rain; within a few years, they had seen their crops disappear. They had tried to take remedial action by planting trees, but not always with positive results.



CONTINUE

In a real war among the poor, they had supported policies of turning migrants away, only to become, in turn, part of that mass forced to emigrate in search of work, a better future, or a home. The great drought, in African territories already affected by famine and poverty, had caused the proliferation of diseases such as dengue and malaria, killing women and children.



Sea crossings had become increasingly difficult, and every year the shipwrecks of those trying to flee en masse became more frequent.

Flora could never erase from her eyes the heart-wrenching images: the abandoned bodies lying on the beach, brought in by the waves together with the fragments of the boat that had sunk along with their lives.

Then, in the midst of all that absurd pain, the police would arrive to take the survivors away. To transfer them to some distant hotspot, as if they had not already been mistreated enough.

The landings continued, increasingly numerous because of climate change, which was making poor territories poorer and poorer.

CONTINUE

Waiting for their arrival were not only the NGOs, but also some representatives of the association “Italians First”.

There was one in practically every country; only the noun changed: “The French First”, “The Dutch First”, “The Germans First”... in a clash of everyone against everyone.

Shaved heads, tattoos of unmistakable symbols: they waited for the immigrants so they could hurl abuse at them and threaten them. Among the group that stationed itself at the pier and sometimes followed the immigrants to the hotspot, one day Flora recognised Ginevra.

The same arrogant, vicious face. For a moment, it felt as though she were back at school. Ginevra was railing and shouting at the immigrants in the same way she had once shouted cruel things at her.

Flora had slipped inside, heading straight for Cosimo’s paediatric clinic.



CONTINUE

Sitting on the examination table were a little boy and a young girl. Both had large, frightened eyes. She was holding the little boy's hand tightly between hers, as if afraid of losing him.

The girl seemed to be of an indefinable age; she bent towards the child's ear, whispering words that were impossible to understand, but that must have been reassuring, judging by the smile that had timidly appeared on his little face.

CONTINUE

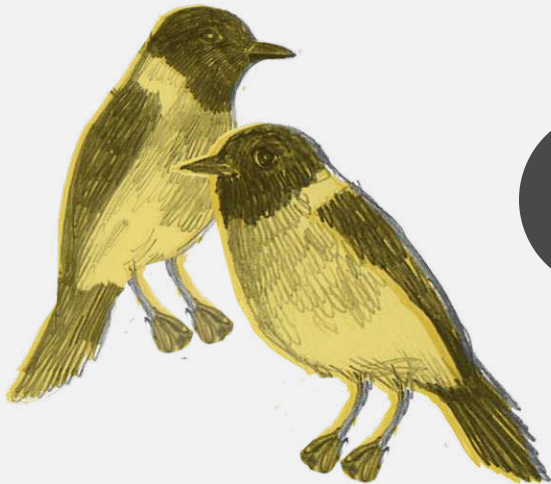


They seemed to her like two fragile little birds.

“They arrived last night with yet another landing. Among the adults who were rescued, none appears to be related to them. The girl speaks a little English. It seems their mother was ‘swallowed’ by the sea... although I’m afraid they may not actually be brother and sister. She, Fatima, could already be eighteen; if that were the case, she could be sent back. Sueli is five,” Cosimo said, then added:

“We have little time to decide what to do. I’m tired of pushbacks; I don’t want to make anyone suffer anymore. Fatima told me she has an aunt in Denmark.”

FLORA’S CHOICE



Flora decides to fight for the two children and to stay. Go to page 32



Flora decides to emigrate with her two children. Go to page 35

Chapter 7. Putting down roots

“Outside, there are those people from ‘Italians First’. Every day the situation gets more difficult. But I no longer want to hide, I no longer want to run away. This country has a problem, but we are not the only ones; the whole planet is on fire, and if we run, if we think we can solve the problem by leaving, sooner or later those flames will reach us,” Flora said with vehemence.

Cosimo smiled beneath his glasses; he wanted to hear those words.

“I agree with you.”

Flora stroked Sueli’s face, and he shyly hid in Fatima’s embrace, while continuing to peek curiously at that big smiling woman. Flora wrote down the girl’s answers, without ever stopping smiling or saying kind words. Suddenly Sueli jumped down from the table and curled up in her lap, wrapping his small, thin little birdlike arms around her.



CONTINUE

“Hello, my little stonechat,” Flora said, holding him close and feeling incredible joy.

Perhaps that was the moment when she made her decision, or perhaps it was after the confrontation with Ginevra a few days later. As always, Ginevra, with her small ragtag group, was besieging the entrance to the reception centre, shouting abuse as the migrants passed by.

Flora used to go through a side entrance to avoid meeting them, but she had grown tired of it and decided to face them.

“Why don’t you take them all into your own homes?” the former blonde girl from Class 5C growled fiercely at her.

Flora stopped and looked at her, towering over her with her height of one metre eighty, then calmly replied: “Of all the nonsense you say, perhaps this one actually makes sense. Thank you for the advice!”

Flora applied to adopt the two young people, while literally the whole world was experiencing an increasingly complex climate situation. However, the new responsibility Flora had taken on with Sueli and Fatima made her stronger and forced her to nurture hopes for the future. Flora had become the spokesperson for a project to create an extended oasis.

CONTINUE

"We have to start somewhere!" she had said on the day she gathered her former colleagues.

Following the example of other countries, they had begun planting trees, aware that it would be a long, complex undertaking with uncertain results. But she wanted Sueli and Fatima to have a better world, or at least one that tried to be.

Every now and then she would leaf through the old records where she had written down and monitored the passage of the small migratory birds. She would show Sueli the images and photographs of those little creatures. She had given him a notebook in which he loved to draw them and imitate Flora's work.

"Perhaps one day you too will be an ornithologist."

Sueli would smile at her, happy.

From the window, for a moment, she thought she saw a little stonechat. Perhaps it was a mirage, or perhaps a small hope.

THE END





In Africa, an ambitious project is underway: the construction of a Great Green Wall, a barrier made of vegetation stretching across the sub-Saharan Sahel region. If completed, it will become the largest reforestation plan of all time, with the aim of countering the effects of global warming and halting desertification, a problem that affects the entire planet.

The project was inspired by the one implemented by China, which, over almost half a century, has carried out one of the largest reforestation projects in history. Through the Three-North Shelterbelt Programme, around 66 billion trees have been planted to create a gigantic green belt around the Taklamakan Desert, the second-largest sandy desert in the world after the Rub' al-Khali. This belt of trees not only helps stop the advance of the sands and protect grasslands and farmland, but is also transforming arid and unproductive areas into a vast "tool" capable of absorbing CO₂ from the atmosphere.

Professor Yuk Yung, a science professor at Caltech and senior researcher at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, argues that the study's results show how human intervention can improve carbon sequestration in the driest landscapes, while slowing desertification.

Chapter 8. Doubts

During the night, she could not fall asleep. No matter how much she mentally went over the reasons for taking a stand, she could not make up her mind. She kept talking to herself, trying to convince herself, repeating reassuring phrases and trying to find comfort in her own convoluted reasoning.

She kept telling herself that she had studied so much and that the lives of migratory birds were increasingly in danger. The decline was truly drastic, and the funding that had arrived was what everyone wanted. How many times had she heard them complain: "If only we had more money..."

Out loud, as if trying to reassure herself, she repeated to herself: "Now, finally, the money is there. Sometimes one cannot afford to be too scrupulous. There will be other chickens, whereas if the kingfisher, or the little stonechat, were to disappear... People do not realise that everything would be altered. My mission is to take care of the little migratory birds."



CONTINUE

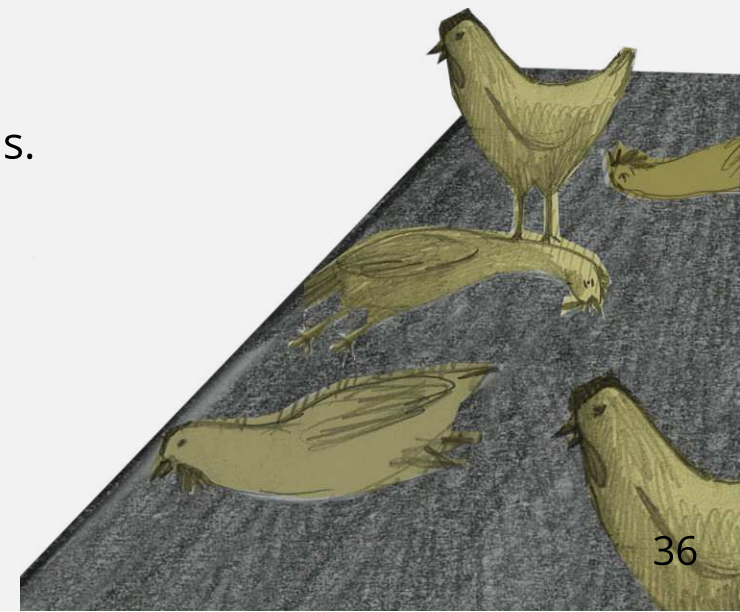
Her thoughts piled up in her mind as she tossed and turned in bed; the twisted blankets seemed to suffocate her, like her own reasoning tightening around her heart. Like a compact mass of flocks, her thoughts floated, flowed through her head in waves.

No matter how many times she reformulated her thoughts from the beginning, they always left her dissatisfied. Her decision did not convince even her. As had happened before, anxiety always gave her a fever. She was forced to call: "I can't come to work today."

At last, she managed to fall asleep. When she woke up, it was late afternoon. She picked up her phone; there were messages from her colleagues. In almost all of them, there were only the words: "Watch TV."

On the news channel, they were showing the protesters storming the farms. Sick, dead animals being pecked at by others. Frantic shouting.

CONTINUE



She turned off the television, feeling sad, as though she had lost the chance to be on the right side. To do something against yet another bully, “the chicken bully”, as they had called him.

She felt powerless, like the little birds caught in the net, like her young self when they insulted and mistreated her.

The latest data she had recorded came back to her: the birds that had never returned, the decline the species had suffered, and how much this had affected the environment, nature and people. Working at the oasis had taught her that insects, animals and birds are part of one great ecosystem, that their presence provides us all with drinking water and clean air, fertile soil and a better climate that technology cannot replace. If we pretend not to see, if we show no interest, we are showing no interest in ourselves and in our own lives.

Flora understood that this time, it was she who had shown disrespect. She had shown disrespect towards her own future, towards those exploited animals, towards the environment. Because everything is connected: we cannot always live in a happy oasis. We have a duty to act, to say no, even for those who do not have that power.

THE END

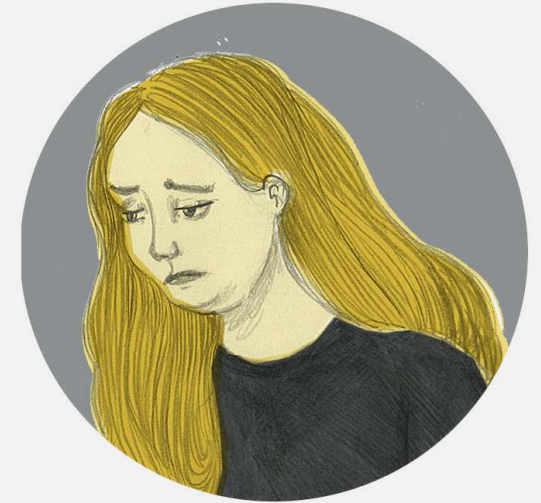
Chapter 9. Closed within herself

On her way home that evening, the pleasant feeling she had experienced faded, giving way to her usual doubts and reflections: how good it felt to take part in demonstrations, but how, deep down, they were not really very useful. Besides, by taking a stand she had already lost her job, and she did not want to compromise herself any further.

Later, slipping under the covers, she thought she would decide the next day: if, when she woke up, she felt that she absolutely had to take part, she would go; otherwise, she would start looking for work, since she no longer had one.

The alarm had already been ringing for several minutes, the usual birdsong reminding her that it was time to go to work at the oasis. But the oasis was no longer her place. This thought struck her and made her sad.

“I will not go to the demonstration,” was her next thought.



CONTINUE

After her shower, she stood in front of the mirror and, speaking aloud to her reflected self, began giving herself advice: “Will there be other oases not funded by criminals where I can find work? Things cannot be solved through protest... sometimes they just are what they are.”

As she tried to apply mascara to her lashes, she stopped, the mascara wand suspended halfway, her face close to the mirror, as if she needed to know. She tried to read the tiny words printed on the side of the tube; she wanted to know whether it was a vegan product, not tested on animals, because even small decisions like that could be useful. Could have an impact and make a difference. But with a shake of her head, she drove that thought away and finished applying the mascara.

When, a few hours later, she looked at the clock, she did so only to make sure that by then the demonstration was over. Again, she made an irritated gesture, as if to shake off that feeling. To avoid thinking, she began reading the news on her phone. She would have liked to distract herself with something frivolous, but the algorithm showed her only news about climate change: about how the hottest summer ever had killed poor and elderly people in cities who had no access to cool places.

CONTINUE

About how animals were trying to move north in search of coolness and food, fleeing desertification. Just like the masses of climate migrants who set out every day in the hope of finding a place that would welcome them, only to collide instead with safe and wealthy countries which, on the contrary, did everything they could, spending money and resources to exclude those people, with blockades and pushbacks.

As she scrolled through the news, which seemed like shards lodging themselves in her head and heart, she was struck by a face. Someone who had hurt her in the past and who was now continuing to do harm: Ginevra, photographed while shouting abuse at immigrants and at a group of NGO demonstrators, among whom Flora recognised some of her colleagues, whom she had disappointed and abandoned.

She closed the phone and threw it away from her. The march had set off without her; they had waited for her for a while, but in the end they had begun to march, chanting slogans and calling for justice for the animals.



CONTINUE

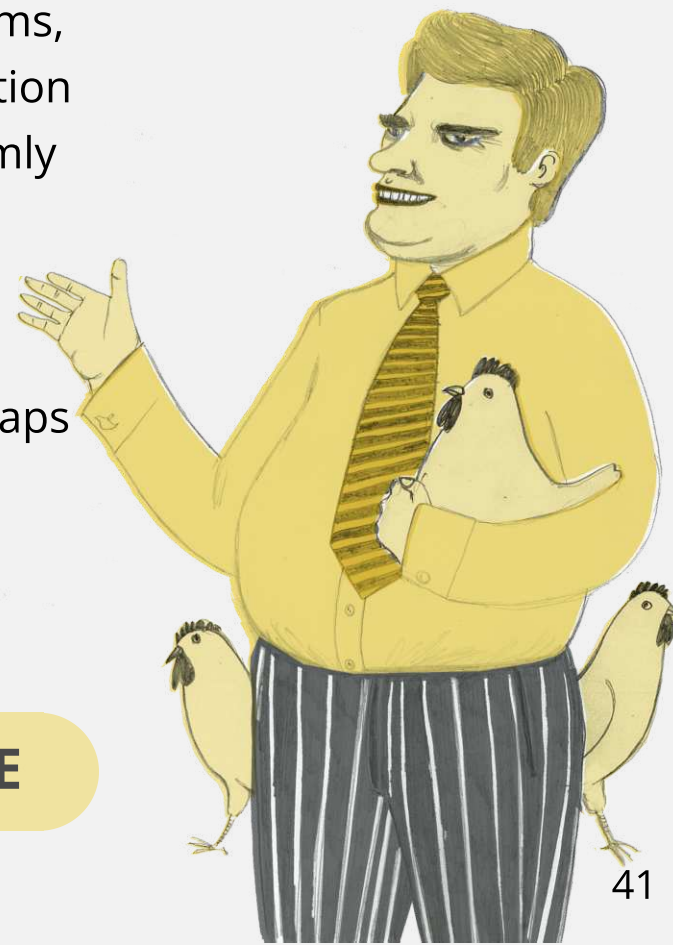
The procession was small; perhaps, like Flora, many had preferred to devote themselves to something else. The few who remained, however, had reached the farm, where Sisifo was waiting for them, supported by the director of the oasis, to tell his own version of events: "What you are saying belongs to the past. We fund research and the oases where endangered migratory birds are protected."

The television crews present filmed the speech and were allowed into the farms, where everything had been carefully arranged to disprove what the investigation had shown. The dead animals had been removed, and plump hens stood calmly pecking in the large green yard.

"Certain television channels only want to damage us producers. we should ask ourselves whether those videos they showed are real, or perhaps artificially created with AI."

By then, the doubt had been instilled, and the advertising campaigns focused on organic farming and animal welfare did the rest.

CONTINUE



Summer had only just begun, but temperatures reached record levels because of the melting of the ice. The bulletin of endangered species had by now become unreadable. Not a day went by without a species being mentioned.

The hot, suffocating air of the city forced people to seek relief in places where air conditioning was free. Many went around wearing masks or handkerchiefs over their mouths and noses, so as not to breathe in the sand that the hot southern wind blew over the cities every day. Others, more fortunate, could afford protective devices to breathe filtered air.

Despite this, however, collective memory was growing shorter and shorter: only a few months had passed since the reports had been broadcast, but everyone seemed to have completely removed the issue and the complications of intensive farming from their minds.

CONTINUE



An empty fridge had driven Flora to the supermarket. Walking through the aisles, she looked at other people's trolleys: the unmistakable packaging with Sisifo's "happy chickens" stood out everywhere. So many people were buying Cartagini products.

Many were indifferent to the welfare of animals and the environment; others because they had been convinced by the advertising; others perhaps because they believe that changing is difficult. Flora had lost her chance, and with her so had all those who, for the sake of a quiet life or out of fear, preferred not to see, thinking it was enough to change the channel, scroll past the video and move on to the next one, shut themselves at home with the air conditioning on, and leave all the problems outside.

CONTINUE



Flora felt the tears fall and wet her face. Turning to a woman she did not know, she said to her:
“Don’t buy them. We are all responsible for change.”

The frightened woman wanted to move away, but Flora raised her voice and addressed everyone.

“It concerns us all: every choice, every decision, every wrong behaviour by any one of us has consequences for the whole community.”

Someone applauded; others quickly moved away. Flora left the supermarket; the heat and sand hit her in the face, making her sway, and she sought shelter in her electric car. Thoughts from the past few months, from the past few minutes, were spinning through her head; she felt strangely euphoric.

Once home, she picked up her phone and quickly wrote the message: “I’m sorry, I got everything wrong. I’d like to come back and help you.” Then she pressed send.

A chirping sound from her phone alerted her to the reply:

“Hi Flora, we’re waiting for you!”

THE END



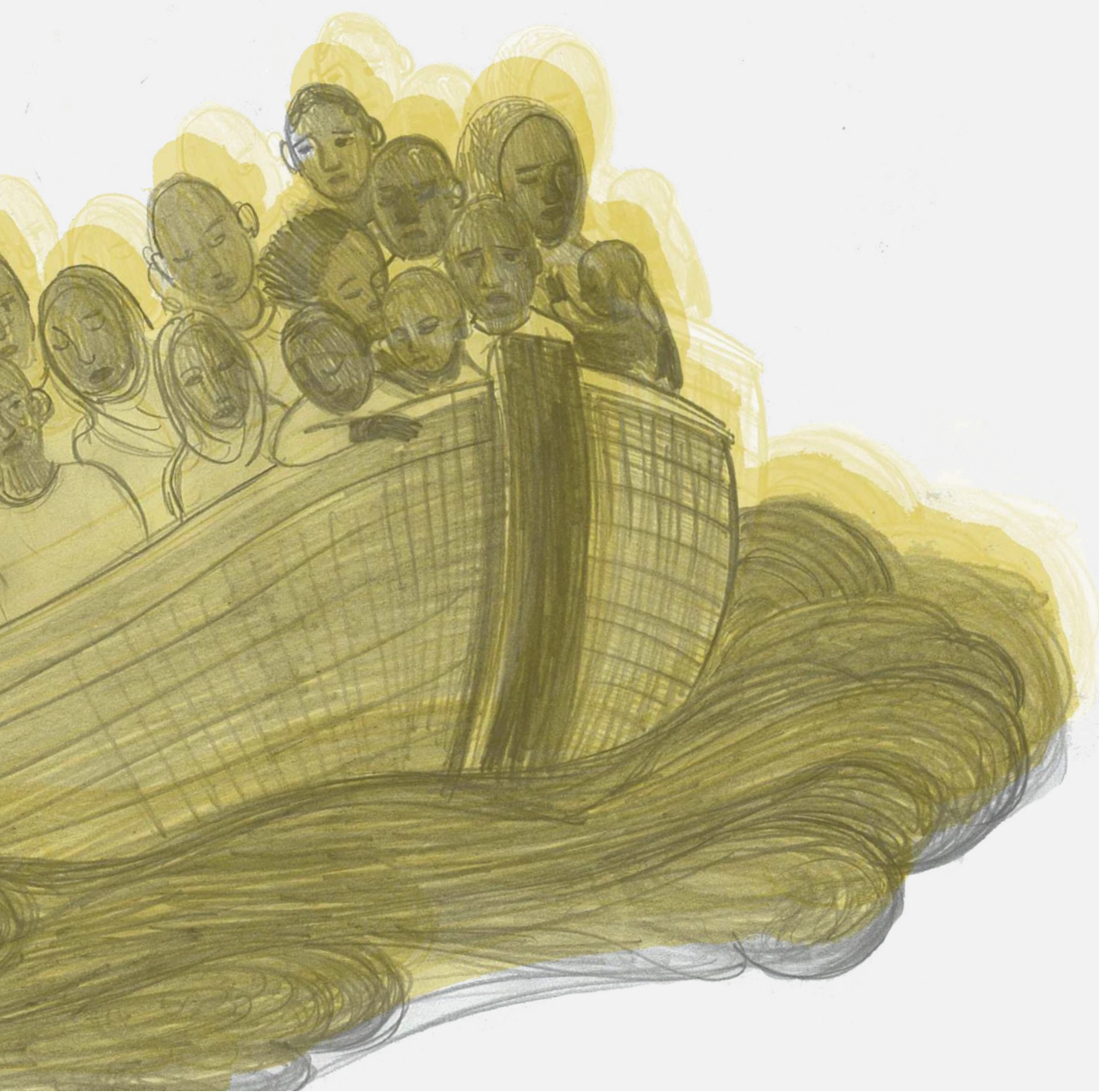
Chapter 10. In a cage

Flora did not feel sure, so she took a few days to reflect. She could not truly understand what she wanted to do with her life. Her friendship with Cosimo, she wondered, was it really only a friendship? She had always been so frightened of everything. Perhaps the shield she had built around herself was preventing her from living, from seeing people for what they were, from making decisions without having to weigh them endlessly because she was afraid of the consequences.

The oasis where she had worked was far away now, and yet it was as though another oasis still surrounded her: a painful mirage that kept her away from everything, from affection, from love, from decisions that concerned not only her own life, but Life itself, the life of everyone, of the world she lived in.

She opened her computer and began looking at the website of Cosimo's NGO. There were photographs of people from other countries, dramatic data on mortality caused by climate change. Did she really want to go on behaving like an ostrich, running away every time something frightened her, or had the time come to act and do her part?

CONTINUE



The news reports were showing ever greater waves of migration caused by summers that were growing more and more torrid year after year.

The desert was no longer some exotic, distant place; climate change was turning once-fertile lands into deserts.

Perhaps soon those who railed against migrants would, in turn, have to pack a suitcase in search of a place to live, and perhaps find themselves up against some “Us First” group of their own.

CONTINUE

Flora felt that she did not like any of this, but she could no longer limit herself to saying that she did not like it. She had to do something, something concrete.

She picked up the phone and, after days in which they had not heard from each other, left a voice message:

“Cosimo, I would like a second chance. I would like to come to your NGO. I don’t know if I am capable of it; in truth, I still don’t feel ready for this, but perhaps if one always waits for the perfect moment, that moment will never come. I know that you can teach me. You can teach me to see the way you do.”

The phone remained silent. Flora realised she would have to win back Cosimo’s trust. Perhaps she shouldn’t wait any longer but take action, because words aren’t enough; it is our actions and the way we behave every day that allow us to change, progress and improve. She got dressed in a hurry: there was much to do to regain the respect she had lost, but she still had hope and her own determination. She went out, forgetting her phone. Cosimo’s name appeared on the screen.

THE END



Chapter 11. Flying away

Flora felt exhausted, as though there were no way out. She drew a long breath, closing her eyes, as if to gather her thoughts. The words of her poem came into her head like a flock, and aloud she said:

“The birds pass by, like love, seeking fire, flying away from abandonment towards light and germinations, united in the flight of life; and along the line and the foams of the coast, the birds that change planet fill the sea with the silence of their wings.”

Cosimo remained silent behind his dark glasses. Then he reached out a hand to find her. Flora moved closer to allow him to find her face. Cosimo caressed her.

“I’ll go with them myself. I’ll accompany them myself.”

“It’s illegal, you know that, right?”

“I know, but what are the alternatives? The world seems to have gone mad. We need oases of happiness; here, it is no longer possible to create one. Not anymore. We have to emigrate too, like them, like the birds. Towards the north, where it is still possible to imagine something different.”

CONTINUE

Outside, meanwhile, a hot wind was blowing as always. A wind that carried pain and anger with it, driving everyone to leave. On the roads, piles of sand covered the last bushes, smothering the little green that remained. Cars moved in long, slow lines.

"Come with us too..." Flora whispered.

"I can't. I have to help those who arrive, but I'm happy you asked me..."

"I wish you would come."

"Let's do this: you go on ahead. Find your oasis - no, our oasis - build the nest, and I'll come."

THE END



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1

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Next



**How does this story make you reflect
on climate change?**

Even though the story deals with emotions, relationships, and belonging, what connection do you see with the climate crisis and the changes it brings to people's lives?



What does it mean to feel “in exile”?

Exile can be physical, but also internal, social, or emotional. In which moments of the story does this feeling appear most strongly?



What did you learn from this story?

Did you discover something new about identity, exclusion, belonging, or the way people respond to difficulty?



In your opinion, what is the relationship between the climate crisis and feelings of uncertainty or insecurity?

Climate change does not only transform the environment, but also the way people live, move, make plans, and imagine the future. How does this aspect emerge in the story?



What can young people do in a changing world?

When the future feels uncertain, what concrete actions can young people still take, both in their own lives and in response to the climate crisis?



How could you act differently in real life?

Does the story make you reflect on your own behaviour, or on the way you face change, fear, or difficulty? Is there anything you could do differently?



Which ending did you reach? What choices led you there?

Think back to the protagonist's journey. Which decisions had the greatest influence on the final outcome?



What message do you think the story wants to leave with the reader?

In your opinion, what is the most important idea that remains at the end of the journey, both on a human level and on an environmental one?



How do thoughts influence actions?

In the story, doubts, fears, memories, or emotional wounds shape the protagonist's choices. In your opinion, does reflection always help us understand better, or can it sometimes hold us back?



Is there a choice that, looking back, you would make differently?

If you could go back through the story, which decision would you change? Why?

FUTHER RESOURCES

Next



UNHCR – Frequently Asked Questions on Climate Change and Disaster Displacement

<https://www.unhcr.org/media/frequently-asked-questions-climate-change-and-disaster-displacement>

BirdLife DataZone – Migratory birds

<https://datazone.birdlife.org/topics/migratory-birds>

FAO – Livestock solutions for climate change

<https://www.fao.org/family-farming/detail/en/c/1634679/>

WHO – Vector-borne diseases

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/vector-borne-diseases>

CMS – State of the World's Migratory Species Report

https://www.cms.int/sites/default/files/publication/State%20of%20the%20Worlds%20Migratory%20Species%20report_E.pdf



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