

## **The Messenger**

Sol dries her tears in her sleeves, weeping. Why can't I be normal like an apple? She asks herself while waiting. Clara, her friend, appears at the door. Rapunzel, two braids on each side of her shoulders, a red and black pajama, comfortable. By the looks of it she hasn't been out yet and only heard the sound of the ring because she was feeding the dove in the living room. It's her new pet. She loves it. I will send a message and wrap rolled paper in its little legs. Did you know they do this? She asks.

Where would you send your message? Sol asks, forgetting her tears for a moment. They can fly 1800 Kilometers to deliver them, Clara explains, not really answering it. She moves away and Sol walks in. Incredible, Sol says, momentarily distracted by the white plump, immobile like a stuffed animal. But soon she begins again. I have to talk to you, she says, just as she told him. In the movie, the immigrants were arriving in France but the Nazis didn't let them stay. It is like the refugee crisis all over, she affirms.

He was playing his guitar and didn't get emotional, she explains, agitated. I don't know why some people don't get passionate about certain things, she tells Clara. But now, Sol, what's really the problem? Clara asks, hoping she will have the time to enjoy her coffee despite the unexpected visit. She has to change the newspaper in the dove's cage too. After she bought the bird she began to watch it constantly, wipe it with a wet cloth, as if it had butterfly wings, very delicate.

I haven't found a way to talk to it, Clara says. Yesterday, the woman I slept with told me it doesn't trust me. It's my bird, she emphasizes, cleaning her eyes, still sleepy.

Sol doesn't understand Clara's relationships. What's a perfect match? She asks, forgetting her hurt for a moment. If there's someone waiting for you out there, every time you meet someone is the right time, isn't it? Clara affirms with conviction. And that's why I keep trying. Sol doesn't apply the same logic to her situation. When she met Rob, she was very dependent on people's affection, and the choice was not to die of loneliness. I need to talk to you about Rob, Sol repeats. I think there is another woman.

Clara grinds the new coffee she bought at Granville Island. Petit Ami Medium roast. She was hoping to make the flavored coffee from Safeway, because she loves the taste of hazelnut, but since there's a guest in the house, she makes the other brand. The beans shine and have a coated glamour. This is the best moment of the day and she can't enjoy it. I shouldn't have come here but I didn't know where to go. I was on my own and I had this feeling of anxiety, Sol says.

Sometimes when we think we know what we need, it is surprising to realize we can live without it, Clara affirms. I didn't know what would happen to me, Sol confesses, remembering loads of merchandise arriving in the store and how she should be at work. What will happen to me? She asks. I saw this ad in the paper about a Givenchy bag and it was like a dream. Can you believe it? I went to check it out, white star on leather: two-way zip, adjustable shoulder straps, exterior and interior zip pocket, calfskin leather, made in Italy. Beautiful, a designer handbag, she resumes.

So I told Rob that if I were rich I would buy this bag, she says. And you know what he said? Clara smells the coffee from the grinder, the powder thin and very brown. It is refreshing. She doesn't use a spoon and drops a certain intuitive amount into the French press. She feels better now that the water is boiling and the coffee is sitting, in wait.

It is an exercise of patience to know what you want, Clara says. Really? Sol asks. What kind of a woman is Clara? Slim, but of course that bothers Sol because she isn't so slim. She sleeps alone but often sleeps around. They met in college when Sol was new in town and needed a friend. But you're unique. I'm sure he thinks that too, Clara says. It's the only thing she can say at this point, especially to someone like Sol who can't live without a relationship. Clara is pouring the coffee, subtle foam making it all perfect. He said I was superfluous and only wanted expensive things, Sol says.

Why do you care about what he thinks? Clara asks. Of course I care, Sol yells back, hating when people have opinions about her. The white dove inside the cage begins to flap its wings when she raises her voice and a pigeon outside lands jumping on the windowsill. Clara has left a piece of muffin there the night

before. She's happy it has attracted a friend. She wants to test the dove's reaction with the social world. I don't think you can judge anyone's desire, Clara tells her. I know what happened, Sol says, angry, but under control.

The new Prime Minister of Canada, all women want him. He's Justin Bieber, Sol says. How do you think his wife feels? She asks. He's handsome. But maybe he's unfaithful, even though he's in the spotlight, a star. I heard he doesn't want to move into the official house in Quebec because it needs renovations. That's where he spent all his childhood when his father was Prime Minister. I'm sure his wife has something to do with that decision, Sol continues. Women are always in charge, she adds, passionate.

I need a man who demands the same of me. Instead, I have to be here, talking to you. These pants were on sale. Do you like them? They are leather, black, and very sexy, Sol affirms, turning around, needing a confirmation.

Clara finds her very attractive, but women of her type demand too much attention and work. The white dove ignores the male pigeon in the windowsill. It doesn't sense the female scent in the room, as the man at the store said it would. He didn't notice, Sol insists. Plus, the Liberals only won in Canada because the Prime Minister is so hot, Sol concludes. It's Saturday morning and I want to have my coffee in peace, Clara says. Say what you want. The night before, something happened to Clara too.

While she was making love to a woman, the dove watched her. As if it knew what she needed it. Yet early in the morning she realized the dove's cage was covered and that the gazing could only have been a dream. Is she being watched again? It wasn't just the movie that bothered me. It was something else, Sol says. I thought you were frustrated because your boyfriend didn't cry in a French movie about the Nazis and that he is having an affair, Clara affirms.

Sol is suddenly paralyzed, recalling why she decided to go there in the first place. Is it true? She asks. Are you having an affair with him? She is breathing fast. So she finally said it, Clara thinks. The thunder, he

told me he was taking you home from the gym and there was a thunder and you got afraid and he held you, and kissed you. He said he always wanted to kiss you. Is it true? She asks.

Clara wishes it were that simple. I don't know what he wanted, she says. It just happened. But no, we're not having an affair. The way you talk about it sounds very dramatic, yet it didn't mean anything. And if he wanted to kiss me, I wasn't expecting it. If it were important I would have told you, Clara says, the woman watching her. So why didn't you? Sol asks. I thought you were gay.

There is no romance between us, Clara affirms, the conversation annoying her. For a moment, when she kissed Rob, she had the sensation she was kissing all the girls he had kissed before. He was popular. And now she had Sol's eyes on her. The coffee is bitter, and she is trying to concentrate on the fact that she's drinking it without sugar, pressed in her own kitchen, not able to move. I've known you for years. How could you? Sol asks. You know, if I felt something for a man, he would be the last one I would go for, Clara says. Sol's confused, Clara can tell.

Why? Because both of you are the same? Can't be happy with one person? Sol asks. I don't need to justify my life to you, Clara says, recalling the woman she made love to the night before but not her name. I don't think you should date someone like Rob anyway, Clara affirms. The dove flies out of the cage and flaps its wings agitatedly when it sees the pigeon outside, the living room's uneven white walls making the space small for him. I think he feels suffocated inside the cage, Sol says, somewhat relieved when she sees him flying away. Do you actually need him? Clara asks.

Sol is nervous because the dove is too close to the window. How do you know it will come back if it flies away? Sol asks. I don't, Clara says. This is not about love, then. Or a perfect match, Sol says. Clara sits by the window and watches the city waking up. I went to the gym and I bought a croissant and I tried to work out but I kept hearing the story over and over in my head, Sol says, turning around and leaving the house, as if she wasn't even there in the first place.

When she didn't get into culinary school because she missed the application day, Sol went to Dairy Queen and ate a five-buck lunch. Two crispy chicken wraps with nutrition facts listed on the menu: 1030 calories and 59 grams of fat.

She wanted to change her life because everyone in her family said she was getting sloppy after her two other sisters got married and she didn't. But she won't do the same today. Impulsively she calls Rob, who has the urge to say that they weren't really committed. He says he was just having fun. She hangs up, now knowing how not to choose someone out of desperation. You don't know anything about me. You're too selfish, she told Clara, before leaving. I'm falling in love with a dove, Clara replied, even though there was no longer anyone there to listen.

People on the street appear calm and quiet to Sol, despite her affliction. A man dressed in a white shirt with a sign on his chest that says nudist in action waves from across the street. She's trying not to think about Clara or her destiny. For the things she regrets saying, the worst was to accuse Clara of not knowing what to do with her own life. Everything should be like a Matisse painting, a naked blue, she imagines, very tired all of a sudden and calling a taxi.

Clara feels safer having the house to herself again. The dove has discovered a new place on the top of the bookshelf, and doesn't seem to want to leave at all. There's no need to write a message or even think about a destination, because it enjoys being there with her, even if that means nothing. She calls Sol and tells her she is sorry, but she can't change who she is. In the taxi, there are rosaries hanging in the front mirror but Sol hasn't seen them before, only familiar with the catholic religion.

I'm Buddhist, the driver says. He tells her that all his family is in Sri Lanka. He lives alone here. Alone? She asks. Always alone, but it won't be like this forever, he affirms, hopeful. Now I only work, he says. Sol finds his eyes in the mirror and nods. He sends money to his family, wants them to be well taken care of.

He shows her pictures while he drives. His wife and daughter wear colorful clothes, great and long saris that cover all their bodies. They smile a lot. There are a lot of people around them. They buy a house with the help he sends. The price of property in Vancouver is absurd, he emphasizes. It is true, Sol answers. Without his wife he feels lost, he says. I don't eat well, I work too much, and everything is a bit wrinkled, he explains, raising his coat in the front seat to show it to her. She is my center, he says.

Sol wants to agree, to say that she also has someone to take care of her, but she can't pronounce a word. Somehow she is dull and not crying because she's exhausted. Ten dollars, the taxi driver says when they arrive. She pays him and he doesn't seem surprised with the higher tip, perhaps not noticing. When she checks her phone, there is a message from Clara, telling her she is sorry about what happened but she can't change who she is. Neither can I, Sol thinks, yet I will have to.

Arriving at work, she is happy to encounter a painting by Vik Muniz inside the store's main wall, a proof that residues of garbage, chocolate and jam still find meaning in beauty and transformation. She imagines her soul a bit like that, with invented mixtures, not always making sense, in an uncontrollable motion, pockets of ideas and emotions arising from unknown places. As the first customer of the day walks into the store and asks for something beautiful, Sol assures the woman that she knows exactly what she needs. She will find her a dress that will strike everyone's attention. So she picks a shelf, chooses an outfit, and shows it to the woman.