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The Last Mating Call

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It was the last of its species. A timeless link of evolution faced extinction if it failed to mate and breed.

Mother Nature ingrained an innate, subtle instinct to procreate in its creations, goading the bird fly to the southern continent. It flew across the terrain, catching insects, gobbling fish, resting briefly, desperate to complete the arduous mission, and fulfil its instincts.

The land had denatured drastically. Rising seas submerged life sustaining swamps, denuded forests with dead tree stumps thrust from sand dunes, toxic rivers meandered into barren deserts, spewing thick noxious mists. Many species had disappeared, some lived in zoos, a few in shrinking reserves, most of them in movies, a lamentable reminder of man's rapacious greed.

The bird finally glided to a cliff where its ancestors nested since aeons. The cliff now overlooked a crowded fishing village, bustling with boats, people, and dogs. It perched on its home a rocky outcropping, chirping frustrated at the marauding defiling invasion.

The desolate injured land glared back accusingly through white, harsh misty veils of snow. The sun glimmered feebly, thawing ice, shedding trickles of streams that disappeared into icy rocks. Yet there was life, tendrils peeked defiantly from the snow, insects flitted busily, fish swam inquisitively, nature fed her children, sustaining life, and the bird fed ravenously.

It flew crying shrilly 'kip keerr' calling for a mate. No one answered.

Determined to nest it pecked bits of feathers and grass under a small rock, to build a nest, impress a mate, and shelter eggs.

It fluffed its feathers and performed the ritual mating and courtship dance to an imaginary mate. Chest puffed, head high, it sauntered cockily, courting, waiting for acquiescence. Only vacuous desolation watched.

Surely, she had heard its voice over the village din. Where was she?

Desperate dim memories forced it fly further into the cold reaches of the icy land. The despondent cry echoed emptily across the bleakness. Each cry, each wing flap, sapped its strength. It flopped under a rock, wet and exhausted to fly.

The heart beat dimly, the neck cocked to catch a whimper of another bird.

The faint morning sun dried its wings, and it survived, eating the swarming insects, gaining strength. Days passed, summer was waning, and nights grew perceptibly longer. Icy winter waited to grip the continent, and it had to fly back or perish.

On the last lap of summer, it flew further into the cold land, uttering its last mating call. Instinct and unrequited love drove it. It flew through a blinding blizzard, further into the unknown, to the far tip.

An answering cry!

The lady bird huddled under a small cliff in an abandoned nest. Quickly he wooed her the courtship hurried, and they mated. Soon the eggs would come then the chicks, fluffy balls of life.

He would hunt and bring them food and watch them grow in the brief time they had. The family would fly back together. They were the last of the species.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Based in Pune, India, **Shashi Kadapa** is the managing editor of *ActiveMuse*, a journal of literature. His short stories appeared in anthologies of *Casagrande Press*, *Alien Dimensions #11*, *Spadina Literary Review*, *The Times of India and Debonair*, and forthcoming in anthologies of *Agorist Writers and Escaped Ink*. Shashi is working on a book of short stories and a novel.