



Hummingbird Bouquet

by Benjamin Niespodziany

My Pilates instructor smells like sage, tells us to address her as Toucan. We forget her name and call her Parakeet, Canary, Pelican. "Excuse me, Ostrich?" I ask as I stretch my best, "which way do I have to twist again to make my ears pop?" Toucan burns oils and tells us to bend and breathe, to kill our vultures, to wound our inner crows, to release our firebirds like fruit bats at sunset. As the rainforest soundtracks through a phone speaker, she gives us all bird masks. They fall off mid form. She wears one that's more expensive than ours. It holds on tight. Someone in our class asks Toucan why the price tag still hangs from her rainbow feathers. She points to the chalkboard that reads,

This is a ceremony. Only hum. If you speak, pray to the moon that it's an exhaled whisper. A hush as though we're waiting to lay eggs, harvesting feathers to breathe for the hatch.

We still forget her name, still call her Cockatiel, still knock over her rainstick once the whale calls quiet. Once it's absolutely silent.



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