

The Long Journey

The cold air is beaten by wings as our large flock flies South West. This high above land, our yaps and barks echo for miles. We have been flying for days, first along coastline and then land white with the first brushes of snow. My fellow geese have done this many times; I only hatched this Summer, and this is my first migration.

I had asked mum why we had to leave. The grasses were lush around the pond, and our feeding good. I was only a few weeks old then, and I was already growing fast and plump. Mum shook the water from her beak, her long black neck catching the evening sun.

“We go because it grows cold here.”

My whole life had been warm and snug beside my family’s side. I couldn’t imagine what she meant. “Cold?”

“Yes, too cold for food.” She rustles the grasses with her short black beak and then nods to the land around us. “This is covered with white snow. Very little grows. We leave for food, for a warmer Winter. We have always migrated this way.”

I look at the plants around us, which rustle with the movement of geese. This was the only home I knew. To leave would be scary, but I trusted my mother’s wisdom.

She preened a stray feather on my wing. “We will be back once it is warm again. One day you will raise your own children here.”

That future seemed too far away to think about, but it was only a few weeks later when we took to the skies. The journey would be long and hard, with some stops to feed on the way. I quickly grew tired. If I had not eaten so well or if the wind had not been so gentle, I would have struggled to keep up.

My wing muscles grew sore and my feet felt odd to be unused for so long. When we first landed at a stopover, I slept immediately, cuddled up next to mum. I couldn’t imagine what this new home would look like. I began to feel like we would never arrive, that maybe it didn’t really exist. Would I ever feel well rested again? Would I ever feel full again?

At one such stopover, my mum pointed out the best food for me. She took the paler, scraggly grasses for herself.

“We are not alone. Many other animals take these long journeys. When we arrive, we will see other geese that come from faraway places we will never see. Even the humans that came to watch us after you hatched may migrate. It is the rhythm of many lives.”

I slept soundly beside her that night.

The next stop is our new home. My wings feel stronger and I am more confident that I can make it. We cross one last sea, and the green land with dense forests and winding rivers, spreads out before us as we continue West.

Mum comes up beside me. "When we see the sea again, we will know we are there."

I keep my eyes glued as far ahead as I can, eagerly awaiting the vast sea. It takes another night before we see the sparkling blue water in the early Winter sun. As one, we break into happy yaps and barks. We are almost there.

Soon the large flock lands on the coastline. Mum was right; there are other geese, not just ones that look like us. Some have pink feet and yelp rather than yap. Others honk loudly, and are so large that at first I'm intimidated. There are grey geese, too, whose call is even stranger.

They welcome us and make space for us to graze too. Though it is all strange and overwhelming, I know soon it will feel just as familiar and homely to me as my Summer feeding site was. Despite everything, we have arrived. I add my yaps to the air which is already full of sound. The journey is over, and we are home for Winter.