

Blue Crane

By Ian Jang

There once was a beautiful blue paper crane. Its edges were sharp, its creases crisp. With just the gentlest touch of the wind, it lifted off the ground and fluttered free. A graceful flash of azure followed by the faint breeze, it brought joy and good fortune to all who gazed upon it. However, the world was dark and gray, and the crane, being the only source of light, was coveted by all. As quickly as it had entered the realm, it was torn to shreds by the greed and violence of the inhabitants. People fought desperately, hideously, for just a single scrap of this light. Now, it is all gone.

This was the world I was born into. A dark, gray land, interrupted only with the slightest pops of blue, which were muted further by covetous hands. The ground remained dry, the air remained thick, and the wind remained torn. Nobody smiled. Even with their pieces of the crane, the warlords were joyless. We were a divided land, split bitterly. Though there were groups built around these flakes of the crane, we were only alienated further. Incessantly these factions warred against each other, wanting more and more precious blue light. Life, if it could even have been so graciously called such a thing, was a free-for-all. Nothing had changed since the crane's fall; people still envied, hated, and tore away what they could. We were all pirates, and our treasure was the remains of the crane.

Where do I fall into this? Well, I, like the rest of those wretches, also searched for light. For me, my quest began once I realized a burning desire for a piece of the crane, for a pinch of blue that I could call my own. Immediately, I joined the ranks of the world as yet another envious thief. Travelling alone, I left my home, if I even had one to start with. The roads were bleak; the

fields were dim; the sky was colorless. My feet were black with biting cold. Even still, I persisted onward doggedly. Passing countless others, others who were also filled with the same desire for just a sliver of the goodness in the world, my lips remained still, silent. I could not risk anyone intruding on my quest. The light that I found would be mine and only mine. That was my desire, to be happy alone.

One day, after hours, or perhaps only minutes (My sense of time had been long lost), of trudging over the potholes and rubble of the city, I stopped. It was just another monochrome alleyway, with hollow buildings on both sides and dark, squelching slop lining the sidewalk. But was that a breeze I felt? The kiss of coolness, and the feeling of anything at all? My heart began to beat. Frantically surveying the buildings, one stuck out. It looked like all the others I had passed, if not a bit more intact. It was the standard set of monotonous stone walls, held together by wooden struts and punctuated by a single doorframe, hollow and inviting. Deep down, though, I knew I had found what I had been searching for.

Passing through its bare doorframe, I entered the single room, where unbeknownst to me, my life would change quite contrarily to my ideals. I ducked past the silvery cobwebs and hanging support beams until I reached the back corner. There, I saw it. The paper itself was underwhelming, being no more than an inch long and carrying visible crinkles, but the feeling was different. Oh, the feeling. Life, warmth, and goodness radiated from the simple shred of paper. Shining, shimmering, stunningly bright blue, it was like nothing I had seen before. It was color. Though small, it had come from the crane; it had once flown far over all, shining boldly until it was torn away. It filled me with joy and hope, sensations I had never felt before.

Slowly, however, my eyes trailed downward. The scrap of wonderful paper was not alone, for it was clutched tightly by a mangled, filthy hand. Its owner glowered at me, shrinking

deeper into his corner. He was a frail old man, eyes likely too dim to see his assailant, legs likely too weak to run, and hands likely too shaky to grip the paper securely. Exhausted, perhaps from holding on so long to his sole shred of joy, attempting to hide it from the rest of the world and finally failing, he opened his mouth to croak his last pleas.

“Forgiveness.”

Suddenly, that primal urge resurfaced, that burning desire that drove me to set out in the first place, enduring all the suffering it had taken to reach this moment. I felt no sympathy. I listened not to his plea. With one fluid motion, I wrangled the delicate strip away from resigned hands and ran. I heard not a scream, not a single sound, nor felt any form of resistance. He only stared at me as I fled, eyes simultaneously hollow and filled with regret. Bursting out of the building, I sprinted away. Hills, fields, streets, and buildings flew past me. Slowly, or perhaps quickly (My sense of time had been long forgotten), the craving subsided. My heart beat slower and slower, until finally, it stopped. Looking back, I saw not a trace of the old man. I had done it. A piece of the crane, of goodness, held in my left hand. I would love to say my chest rushed with pride, but it was not so. The earth was still gray, and once more, I felt nothing. Nothing? How? The sliver of the crane glowed stubbornly, but I felt none of its light. Fatigue hit my legs like a truck, and I sat down to rest on a nearby lump of rubble.

I sat there, the crumpled slip in my hands. How many before had held it, just as I did? How many had stolen? And how many were happy? Was there a single one? I came to a shocking realization: if the world kept ripping away and hoarding the light, humanity would remain obstinately in darkness. Not I, nor the one before me, nor the one to whom that sliver would eventually fall, would be touched by the warmth of the crane.

Suddenly, like a roaring lion awakened by hunger, that burning desire returned. Except this time, it was different. I wished to make a change. If the light would flee from my hands someday, what would my life amount to? No, I was not made to chase mindlessly after the light like a moth, passing away and leaving an empty, hollow, unfulfilled shell behind. That man from before, his hollow, sorrowful eyes haunted me. I had stolen the last of his light, and it was my job to make amends. I had a duty, to heal the scars that I, and the rest, had created. I would have to take a step never taken before, a step to restore the humanity that humanity had lost. But if I were to make a single change, no matter how miniscule, I would have to step against the current, against the cycle that sucked and drained.

I paused. The wind whistled softly through the crumbly grass. The sky, though dim as always, seemed to twinkle. Surveying the barren, cold, soulless landscape, what I saw instead was this: a world where the sky was a peaceful blue, the water a deep navy, the rubble a brilliant cobalt, and the grass a gentle azure. I saw a land where the wind blew through the fields, the waves crashed against the shoreline, and the sky brought rain. Oh, the feeling of the rain, washing away every misgiving and fault, bringing life, real life, for which we all yearned. I saw a city full of warm homes, refreshing ice cream, and everything in between. I saw love. I saw happiness. I saw blue, not gray. It was what could have been, what it could be, and what I would make it. Perhaps, instead of taking, I could give.

“Forgiveness,” I murmured to myself. That strange word that the stranger had said before, perhaps that was what the world needed. Without understanding how, maybe even without knowing why, I began to turn the slip over, folding it gently, pouring in that desire. The hope that I felt from the radiance of the crane, it had to be shared. The cycle of pain, theft, and hiding would end with me. A few more creases, and the crane began taking shape, glowing

brighter as my heart swelled. Resolutely, I resolved I would not hurt anyone any further, not even myself. Instead of stealing, I would share. Crossing the paper over itself, I straightened out every edge and pinched every corner. Instead of running away, I would run towards. I bent and folded flaps with the utmost precision and care. Instead of hating, I would love. With the last two folds, tucking the wings downward, I made my final realization. Instead of continuing this vicious pattern, instead of succumbing to the course of the world, instead of inflicting more pain on a stranger and thinking it would somehow take away mine, I would...

“Forgive!”

And I would never stop forgiving. That was how I would heal the gray land I was born into, by one small crane at a time! With that, I released the crane into the monochrome sky, watching it flutter to life and blaze furiously, fighting to find someone to bless with my light. Finally, my chest swelled with pride. The sky, for the first time since the tearing, was kissed by the blue, pierced by the kindness of one person. I watched as the crane drifted away into unknown lands, eventually fading into the gray.

I waited. The field lay silent, and my heart began to slow once more. Did it fall midway on its journey? Had my folds fallen short? Was my care not enough? Would my small act of kindness, of difference, of transformation, reach no one? Was I nothing to the world? And so, I waited, in a field that remained silent. My heart ceased beating, as it always had.

Finally, far in the distance, I saw a dim blue. *It has returned to me, its efforts fruitless*, I thought to myself gloomily. Except, it was not my crane. As it slowly, or perhaps quickly (My sense of time had been long unrestored), flapped into my hands, I felt a warmth that was not mine. The field began to shake with the gentlest breeze; my heart began to quiver with feeling, with life, with hope. It was like the crane was smiling at me. Suddenly, it shot into the sky. My

eyes searched the hollow heavens, but what I found was not emptiness; no, it was a sky full of stars. Paper cranes, glowing brilliant azure, cobalt, and indigo, rose from places foreign, shining into an expanse so familiar to the world. As I gazed into the atmosphere, a canvas speckled with diamond tears, hopes, and dreams, I knew humanity was staring with me. They flew together, reuniting into one, the same paper crane that had blessed humanity and brought color to the seas, hope to the hearts, wind to the trees. Finally, after all this time, the rain fell. Oh, how it poured. As heaven cried, so did I, for it was I, it was them, it was all of us that now breathed in life and were satisfied. “Forgiveness,” I murmured to myself once more as I, no, we basked in this glorious rapture.

There once was a beautiful paper crane. Its edges were sharp, its creases crisp. Though once torn, it had been repaired, bit by bit, by the people of a once gray world, to which they brought blue.