**Homing**

Laurence Lumsden

No one chose the time and place of their birth. No newborn ever proclaimed themselves a Muslim or a Catholic or a Jew, not in a stable in Bethlehem, nor in the over-crowded hospital of a bombed city where the power had gone off again.

None of this had to happen.

A father never intended to carry the deadweight of a lost family. He didn’t dream of becoming a refugee, or plan to become a taxi driver in a land whose language he couldn’t speak. An undamaged man never watched his vaporous breath on a frosty night and saw the contrails of a bomber, nor heard the roar of a fighter jet in the sound of a skateboard rolling by on the hard pavement beneath his balcony.

The tender memory of the soft thigh of a woman, dead for twenty years, was no substitute for love. Neither was it a dream to be startled awake by the beat of helicopter blades cutting the shrieking air, only to realize that the sound announcing the cold dawn was the whipping wings of pigeons.

Those gentle cooing pigeons, descendants of hardy immigrants from African cliff tops, had made homes for themselves all around this blessed planet. Their feathers were sleek and purple-sheened in every country’s dawn. But he’d heard his neighbour say that they were an invasive species, worse than rats, and it was then he knew that he had much in common with the pigeons.

It wasn’t an option for them to go back to where they’d come from. They’d nested under his neighbour’s eaves, a reasonable man who had defended his territory by placing chicken wire around their little space. The mating pair was trying to reach their nest, trying to save their cooling eggs from the final chill, frantic in the contested airspace above a city block.

It wasn’t a resentful man who stood on the railings of his balcony and stretched across the gap to his neighbour’s. On the tiptoes of his weary feet, he could just about grasp the chicken wire. He pulled it out in a black ball and watched it plummet to the pavement far below, disappearing into the morning’s shadows.

The pigeons swooped under the eaves to their nest, and he delighted in their excited chatter. His feet slipped easily off the railings. For just a moment he was flying too.