
The Passage of Time

by Noa Lior

A lone in my apartment, sleeping in my bed, I awake with some odd movement at my feet. I move back the covers in one quick motion to expose my legs. The frog jumps to the floor. He leaps around my apartment, an elegant dark grey arc in the lighter grey of 5 a.m., whimsical and joyful.

I reach over to a straw box on the green wood cubes I use as a bedside table. It used to hold condoms. I get out of bed. I turn on a small lamp. With the box top in one hand and the box bottom in the other, I catch him as he begins a leap.

Out on my balcony, I release him over the edge. I am too lazy to dress, go downstairs, walk three minutes and release him into the ravine. As he falls, so does my estimation of myself. How can he possibly survive a 12 storèy fall straight down onto concrete? Will there be a splat? I realize this now. It is too late.

It is light outside now, and I can see perfectly. I look down. Instead of the roof of the main entryway which I usually see, halfway down the front wall of my building one of the apartments on the sixth or seventh floor has a large terrace. It is full of plants and potted flowers. I feel better. His chances of survival are improved. A shorter fall, and the very real prospect of a softer landing.

I am still on my balcony. No frog. No terrace below. I am watching a fairly large bird fall. Like a rock. Calmly. Unflapping. Head up. Feet tucked in. Wings tucked in. He is making no motion to fly.

"Move," I think to him. "Move! Fly! Try!" He does not even seem distressed. He approaches the ground. He lands. I wince. Then I look. He is motionless for only moments, then begins to walk around. He is completely fine. I breathe.

I go downstairs. Instead of being at the front of the building, I am at the back. It is the back of the building I grew up in. I move very quickly to the two little girls waiting for me. One is three or four years old. The other is nine or ten. They stand close one to the other. I kneel in front of them, and scoop the younger into my arms. She has just been through a risky experience, the threat of physical harm. She is unhurt. I know this without examining her. She is not crying. I take her into my arms to comfort and reassure her.

The-older girl, who has not faced the same danger, looks me in the eye steadily and says: "Sometimes I am jealous when she gets all the attention."

I gather her into my arms also. I hold them both. I like them both. Equally. Wholly and deeply. Uncritically and instinctively. I did not give birth to them. Yet they are of me.

