

PORTLAND REVIEW

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LABOR



Assisted Migration

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She first saw them land
as she cut wheat straw,
wings iridescent, sickle bills red as jasper.
They gathered straw, too,
necks twining like vines,
pairs clacking and grunting
in proffered courtship.

On days of observance
she spurned rest and followed
the V of ibis flight
to cliffs where they nested.
Climbing came with time
as she stemmed her way
to ledges washed in white.

She watched pairs preen,
saw new eggs turn
from light blue to flecked brown,
one end stretched
to twirl like clock-hands when bumped
and not roll to the rocks splashed below.

Whispers broke camp
as they prepared to leave.
She sat cross-legged on packed ground,
spinning fertile talismans
plucked from the rock face.
“Sacred,” her elders chided, “rare as lapis,”
shaking their axes to fate.

When morning came,
grain and dates bagged,
possessions packed and wrinkled,
she placed the orb of an egg
under each arm—bone into socket—
to brood during passage.
They turned east from the cliffs
and she raised neither voice
nor arms as she walked,
incubating dreams of flight.