

# I Will Sing For Her

By Jules Lough

As the moon shines down upon her grey face, cheeks sunken and tear-stained, I will sing for her. I will sing for her as she lies her head on her overstuffed knapsack with the broken zipper. I will sing for her as she curls into herself on the unyielding wooden splintered slats of the park bench. Wearing only a hooded sweatshirt, I can see her frail body shivering in the cool autumn air. It will get colder as the day wears on.

Her sleeping bag is soaked; the rain had been relentless last night. She had hidden it in the bushes hoping that it would be safe. She had stood guard under the old maple, where I am roosting. The winds had become wild gusts, threatening to blow her away. She had clutched her frail arms around the trunk of the tree and rested her soft cheek against its rough bark. I will never forget the sounds of her cries last night. It had been just a soft whimper at first, shoulders barely shaking as she had tried to stifle the emotions welling up within her. As the hours of starless sky had turned into a lightening show with thunder roaring, she had begun to sob loudly in despair, in concert with the storm.

We all know that it's not safe to be under a tree when there is lightening, so I had done my best to alert her. Normally, I lull her to sleep with my gentle chirping. At times, she will join in with my morning call, imitating my trills. Last night, I had summoned all my power to squawk like a greedy seagull. I had wanted to shock her. I had needed her to move away from the tree and find shelter under the park gazebo, or something similar. It had been no use; this had become her safe place.

She had been sleeping on the park bench since April rains brought green buds to the leaves of the magnolia trees in the nearby neighbourhoods. It had been a rainy spring and a hot, humid summer. In parts of the country, forests had been decimated by wildfire. We had smelled the smoke all the way from the north. On one of those nights, she had coughed and coughed until she had thrown up in the garbage bin. Upon seeing her in such distress, a woman had stopped to speak to her. I had heard my friend wheeze, “asthma attack”, and the woman had immediately called 911 for an ambulance. The paramedics had arrived quickly and my friend had been taken to the hospital for treatment. When she had returned early the next morning, she had two new inhalers.

As the storm had raged on last night into the pre-dawn hours, she had finally released her grasp on the trunk and had crumpled onto the muddy ground in exhaustion. She had looked up at me for a moment and our eyes had locked. Swollen and red-rimmed eyes, a beautiful dark brown, had reflected the stigma and hopelessness that she had been trying to battle for months. I had never seen this look in her eyes, this look of defeat.

The temperature has dropped significantly following the storm. Her sleeping bag will not dry unless she takes it to the laundromat. She has no money and I know that she is too embarrassed to beg. She also has no energy. She has lost so much weight over the past six months and her sweatshirt drapes on her shoulders like dirty curtains. Her sweatpants have a drawstring and it is cinched tight at her empty stomach while the worn fabric billows around her sore legs. Her shoes show the miles she has walked

around malls and parks. Often, I have found her pacing in front of the bench at sunset. I have often heard her calling out in her sleep during nightmares.

She has started to write in her Gratitude Journal, something that she does without fail each day. She had once told me that gratitude allows her to hold onto hope. I can see what she is writing:

“Robin kept me company in the terrible storm last night. She is always watching over me and I will miss her. I am grateful that I could share this part of my journey with her. Her beautiful song will remain in my heart forever.”

She is lying down again. Her lips are blue and her breathing is laboured. I sing for her, the lullaby that is usually reserved for bedtime. The birds in my flock have gathered to the maple and they are singing with me. I can see her smile faintly. No one is walking through the park right now, which is unusual. I sing louder, willing an angel to appear. I need someone to find her and rescue her. I am not ready to let her go.

The wind is picking up again. Leaves in orange, red and yellow hues fall to the ground. She shivers. I long to cover her with my wings, to keep her warm and safe. More birds fly to the trees surrounding the bench. Squirrels appear and sit near her head. We will be here for her. She will not be alone in this moment.

She has left us but she has finally found her home. I can see it in the peace on her face. I will still sing for her: a song of remembrance that honours her courage, her resilience, her gentleness and her hope. She wasn't the first who had found refuge on this bench and I know that she will not be the last. So, I will sing for her, for him and for them; for anyone who needs me, I will sing.