



After God created the heavens and the earth, he stood back to contemplate creation, like a painter standing back from the canvas.

This is the moment we are living in—the moment of God standing back. Who knows how long it has been going on for? Since the beginning of time, no doubt. But how long is that? And for how much longer will it continue?

You'd think it would only last a moment, this delay of God standing back, before stepping forward again to finish the canvas, but it appears to be going on forever. But who knows how long or short this world of ours seems from the vanishing point of eternity?

Now the earth is heating up in advance of its destruction by God, who has decided that the first draft of existence contained too many flaws.

Ready to go at creation a second time, hoping to get it more right this time, God appears, splits, and manifests as three art critics in the sky: a large bird who critiques from above, a large fish who critiques from the middle, and a large bear who critiques while cradling in its arms.



People born from the bird egg are interested in beauty, order, harmony and meaning. They look at nature from on high, in an abstracted way, and consider the world as if from a distance. These people are like birds soaring—flighty, fragile and strong.

People born from a fish egg appear in a flotation of jelly, and this jelly contains hundreds of thousands of eggs, where the most important thing is not any individual egg, but the condition of the many. For the fish, it's less any one individual egg that concerns them than that eggs are laid in the best conditions, where the temperature is most right, and the current

most gentle, so the majority might survive. For fish, it's the collective conditions that count. A person hatched from a fish egg is concerned with fairness and justice here on earth: on humanity getting the temperature right for the many. One thousand eggs are the concern of a fish, whereas the person hatched from the egg of a bear clutches one special person close, as close as they possibly can.

A person born from a bear egg is like a child holding on to their very best doll. Bears do not have a pragmatic way of thinking, in which their favourites can be sacrificed for some higher end. They are deeply consumed with their own. Bears claim a few people to love and protect, and feel untroubled by their choice; they are turned towards those they can smell and touch.

People born from these three different eggs will never completely understand each other. They will always think that those born from a different egg have their priorities all wrong. But fish, birds and bears are all equally important in the eye of God, and it wouldn't be a better world if there were only fish in it, and it wouldn't be a better world if there were only bears. God needs creation critiqued by all three. But here on earth, it is hard to believe it: fish find the concerns of the birds superficial, while birds are made impatient by the critiques of the fish. Nothing makes a person feel like their life's work—or their self—is less seen than when it's being judged by someone from a different egg.

Yet birds should be grateful that someone is making the structural critique, so they don't have to. And fish should be grateful that someone is making the aesthetic critique, so they can focus on the structural one.



God is most proud of creation as an aesthetic thing. You have only to look at the exquisite harmony of sky and trees and moon and stars to see what a good job God did, aesthetically. So those born from the bird egg are the most grateful of all. Those born from the fish egg are the most upset, and those born from the bear egg aren't too happy, either.

Perhaps God shouldn't conceive of creation as an artwork, the next time around; then he will do a better job with the qualities of fairness and intimacy in our living. But is that even possible—for an artist to shape their impulse into a form which is not, in the end, an art form?



This particular story concerns a birdlike woman named Mira, who is torn between her love for the mysterious Annie, who seems to Mira a distant fish, and her love for her father, who appears as a warm bear.



The heart of the artist is a little bit hollow. The bones of the artist are a little bit hollow. The brain of the artist is a little bit hollow. But this allows them to fly. Those who aren't hatched from the bird egg might wonder why it was birds—who centre their thoughts on their own selves—who were born to give the

world its metaphors, pictures and stories. Why should it have been given to the *birds*?

A bird can learn to walk on the ground like a bear, and they can spend their whole life walking—but they will never be happy this way. While a fish on the shore gasps for breath, desperate to get back to the sea.



How Mira would have loved to have been born of the bear egg! How she would love to be an ambassador of a simple and enduring love, down here on this earth. Yet whenever she sets her heart on such actions, they are wished for, strived for, and barely achieved. To properly love another one—this is the stumblingest part of her, the most nonsensical part, the part of her that is most scattered and always to blame.

But she shouldn't feel bad about being a bird, for how beautiful are the flowers in her window—the flowers on her windowsill, over there. How their petals and leaves make each passerby smile, that someone loves beauty and cares. Her flowers make us think of the flowers in the soul of the person who put them there. It is the flowers in the soul of the person who put them there that make us happy and enliven our hearts. The beauty of the flowers is a clue to the beauty of a human heart. They are a keyhole into a human heart.

And a fish's good act, even the smallest action, effectively done, is a glimpse into a human heart. And a glimpse into one heart is a glimpse into many. And the hopes of the bear are shared by all of humankind. And what opens one heart opens many.

Mira left home. Then she got a job at a lamp store. The lamp store sold Tiffany lamps, and other lamps made of coloured glass. Each lamp was extremely expensive. The least expensive one cost four hundred dollars. This was a month's salary for her. Every day, before they closed up for the night, Mira had to turn off every single lamp. This took about eleven minutes. Mostly she turned off lamps by pulling on little beaded cords. She had to be careful not to let the cord snap back and hit the bulb or the lamp. She had to pull the cords with a gentle sort of care. It was tedious work. Mira didn't have the morning shift. That person had to turn on the lamps. Their job was no better than hers.

Across the street there was another lighting store. Where Mira worked, it was just a lamp store, but the other store sold all sorts of fixtures, and also ceiling lights with fans attached—very modern lighting in contrast to their old-fashioned wares. People preferred the store across the street. The owner of Mira's store had just enough customers to stay in business, since most couples went across the street and spent their money on modernistic white lamps, and off-white lamps made of industrial plastic. Mira's co-workers felt sorry for themselves, and said those people had no taste. When it was time to close up shop,

Mira would see the thin man who worked across the street turning off every single light, one by one. They both had the same nightly task. Mira felt that no one in the world understood her, but she wondered if he did. Yet, embarrassed by their similarity, she avoided eye contact with him.

She felt so alone in those days. Not that she minded. It is only when you get older that everyone makes you feel bad about being alone, or implies that spending time with other people is somehow better, because it proves you to be likeable.

But being unlikeable wasn't the reason she was alone. She was alone so she could hear herself thinking. She was alone so she could hear herself living.



How did Mira find her job at the lamp store? She must have walked past it and seen a little sign. How did people find jobs back then, back before everyone knew what everyone else wanted? Little paper signs.

How did she find the room she lived in? There was probably a scrap of paper taped up somewhere, or tacked to a corkboard at a local café. The house had two bedrooms on the second floor, and a bathroom that was shared. There was a large apartment on the main floor, which was occupied by a blond-haired gay man, who came home one night all bloodied and beaten. They met by accident on the stairs, and he turned away from her, angry and shaken.

On her floor lived a lonely man about ten years older than she was, who Mira only saw twice. He was silent and shy. In their bathroom was a dirty tub, so she never took a bath, and she rarely showered. Because the man prepared his dinner in the kitchen, she bought a hot plate for her room.

Attached to her bedroom was a draughty porch with wood-slat walls and subtly distorted windows, set into all three sides. It would have been a pretty room to sit in, if the weather had been nice. But it was fall when Mira moved in, and she was gone by early spring. She kept all the books she owned on a

shelf in that freezing little room. When it was time to move out, she opened the door to collect her books and found they had all moulded and their pages had gone wavy with the damp, deep cold of the winter.

Mira entered school. She was accepted into the American Academy of American Critics, at one of its international satellite schools. It wasn't so easy to get in. Everyone who wanted to be a critic applied. There were only a few spots open each year, so everyone who was accepted immediately had something to brag about. Just getting in placed a certain stamp on your personality and mind. It meant you were a cut above the rest.

The school had a large room with tables, a sort of tetrahedron-shaped room with cheap chairs made of industrial plastic, and shiny, smoke-stained walls. This was where the students hung out. There was a tiny window through which they could buy croissants and tea, and the people who worked behind the wall were rarely, if ever, seen.

In the large room, students stood on desks, declaiming. They made their pronouncements and laughed out loud, and it was the only place in the whole building where they didn't feel they were performing for their professors. It was the only place they felt free. Their vanity was just bursting at the seams! They felt it was important to hone their insights. They knew they had to develop a style of writing and thinking that could survive down through the ages, and at the same time penetrate their own generation so incisively. That was what they had en-

tered school for—they, the elected. They believed the future would be set in the moulds that they had made. It was important to know what you thought of things—what you believed the world to be, and what you thought it *should* be.



They just didn't consider the fact that one day they would be walking around with phones in the future, out of which people who had far more charisma than they did would let flow an endless stream of images and words. They just had no idea that the world would become so big, or the competition so stiff.