

The bird was about 2/3rds of a foot long. Its long inky black beak came from a small but sturdy green head, from which a tuft of feathers shot out backwards, giving the bird a fast roguish look. Below the head there was a scarf of white all the way around the bird before the back turned back to green, while the front showed a brilliant orange chestplate atop a white belly with large black spots. The wing tips turned from green to black, as did the tailfeathers. Her head darted to and fro and her marble eyes surveyed the surface of the stream, looking for ripples, bubbles, or shapes under the surface. She barely weighed more than a golf ball and as such had to be mindful of the sky above, where a larger bird might be looking for signs of her just as she looked for fish sign.

Some half a kilometer away her slightly smaller but otherwise similar mate was sitting over their eggs, 5 eggs laid 10 days ago. They were about halfway to hatching. He would periodically readjust, get up and look at the eggs, sit back on them. Once he stood very alert and gave a low buzzing noise before settling back into the mostly sedentary routine.

The day was getting low and the female would have to get back to the nest soon, to incubate the eggs while her mate hunted nocturnally. She saw a dark form briefly appear under the surface and dove - striking ahead of where she'd seen it. The water rippled and stilled in a way that was hard to call fast or slow, the waves diminishing such that at first it seemed to take a long time for their size to shrink but all of a sudden, after some threshold, the surface was almost still. Just as suddenly she reemerged, piercing the water with a small fish struggling between her beak. Her head tilting to face back

toward shore as her body came up, the rear seeming to 'pop' up and out a bit from the buoyancy and speed with which she ascended.

She flew with it in her mouth to a rock near the shoreline and, once she was still, choked the fish back with small jerks so that it slid head first down her beak, gullet, and into her stomach. Satisfied for the day, she oriented herself and prepared for the short journey home, taking a route where she could always keep a casual eye out for easy prey.

She neared where their burrow was, crunching down on a dragonfly which chanced by too close. Two boys were running away across the shallow part of the riverbed a ways beyond her nest, she considered them briefly, flitting out of sight before continuing on her path. She made a buzzing call outside of her burrow, expecting her mate to exit - the trading of shifts and mutual preening easier outside of the tunnel. When he did not come she made a louder whistling call. When still that failed she cocked her head and entered. Inside the nest the eggs sat alone, she neared them and they were still warm. She settled over the eggs and waited perhaps for his return to his shift the next morning. Hunger, impatience could have caused an early exit. She did not have the ability to think about what to do if that didn't happen. How to keep the eggs warm on cold days.

Across the river, far off now, the taller boy ran holding a pellet gun and the shorter the corpse of a green kingfisher.

It's so pretty, said the smaller boy.

We'll taxiderm it and give it to Ma on Mother's Day this weekend.

Think she'll like it?

It's a whole hell of a lot better than the nothin we gave her last year.