

# Delivery

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Any day now, they are going to come. I lie in my bed night after night and wait, wait for them. While I stare at the windowsill, the flame of my kerosene lamp bounces, illuminating my room. The other girls of the village have instructed me on what to do and what not to do. I keep their instructions in mind. I know I should not be afraid, but I am.

Many girls do not talk about it after it happens to them. They say that it should not matter because of what it brings. They are happy, and I cannot understand why. I want to understand. The cool wind blows in through the window I must keep open. I cluster the bed sheets closer to me, shielding myself from the chill. They are over my mouth and nose, but my eyes remain fixed on the window. I am told that I will hear them coming with the wind.

Perhaps they will forget about me. Perhaps they will leave me alone and go to someone else. Perhaps I could just dim the lamp, close the window and go to sleep.

Some girls try fighting them and end up being scattered all over their room. They are found in such small pieces that actual recognition is impossible. Just a fortnight ago Sister Elizabeth from down the road was declared dead when bloody bits were found strewn about her room. When they tear the girls apart, they never eat the clothes or jewelry. Since they have such thin necks, that kind of stuff gets stuck, so they leave it with the shattered bits of bones.

I wait and wait and I know they are coming but I don't know when and this is worst of all. Sister Carol told me that it will hurt because their beaks are so large. It is long and sharp and I can easily lose an eye. She said not to resist at all because those who have, even a little, had one of those beaks pecked straight through their thigh or shoulder. Sister Carol lost an eye. Sister Veronica lost an ear. Mother Maria has a deformed nose because a beak pierced through it. Sister Bethany has a jaw that doesn't close right.

I am told that all this suffering is worth it. That what I'll end up with is

the greatest treasure that I can ever hope for. I cannot imagine this happening more than once but some girls have three or even four little ones now. The girls with more than two usually have fingers missing or walk with a very strong limp.

If only one visited, then it would probably be easier, but that is not the case. They never travel alone. They fly in through the window in a flock of six or seven. I am told to undress or they will peck my clothes away. This, they say, will surely kill me. So I am here, naked in my bed, ready to throw my sheets to the floor right when they come. I will immediately bend over on my knees to be ready for their entry. Sister Carol said to tuck my head in so that the beak does not go through my skull while they are mounting me. I do not look forward to any of this, but this is how it works. I cannot change how things work. I wish I could. I wish I could change many things but instead, I have to lie here night after night and wait.

Oh, how I do not want them to come. Oh, how I hope they do not come tonight. I do not even want a child but I am told they come to give me one. I hope it is quick. Some girls die after the three-quarter year expecting period, so I lie here dreading two deaths. I hate this wait. This long wait for something I know is coming.

I believe I hear them now. The sound of the flapping enters through the window. I see a cloud of white in the dark night sky closing in. There is no choice now. I wipe a tear off my face, throw my sheets to the floor and get ready.