

Prologue

We live within an eggshell-thin atmosphere  
enveloping a spinning sphere we call Earth.  
Earth's vertical axis of spin is tilted about  $23\frac{1}{2}$  degrees  
off of a perpendicular to its plane of orbit around our star, the Sun.

We have one moon.  
It reflects the Sun's light back at us at night.  
If the Moon is between us and the Sun we see a narrow crescent  
of the Sun's reflected light which is the "New Moon."  
When the Moon is exactly halfway to the left or right of us  
we see only a half dish of reflected light.  
However, if we are between the Sun and Moon,  
we see the Moon completely lit by the Sun.  
It is the "Full Moon."

One complete spin on Earth's axis takes 24 hours and one minute.  
One complete orbit of the Earth around the Sun takes  $365\frac{1}{4}$  days.  
From one Full Moon to the next is  $29\frac{1}{2}$  days, on average.  
Once every 19 years the Full Moon occurs on the exact same day,  
and once every eight years close to the same day.

A mysterious invisible force called "Gravity"  
holds the Moon in orbit around the Earth,  
holds the Earth, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn,  
Neptune and Pluto in orbit around the Sun,  
holds the atmosphere and oceans to the Earth,  
and, indeed, holds the Earth, Moon, planets, and stars  
within their spherical shapes.

These simple cosmic facts shape what we know  
as the seasons, the weather, the tides,  
and a big part of the story that follows—  
the migration of birds in the fall and the spring.

None of the lengths listed above—24 hours and one minute,  
365¼ days, 29½ days, or 19 years—can be divided  
evenly and neatly by a whole number.

In creating our present-day calendar  
our human predecessors compromised,  
devising a year of 365 days, a day of 24 hours,  
a week of seven days, and a month of either 30 or 31 days,  
with February varying in length once every four years  
from 28 to 29 days, called “Leap Year,” to make up the shortage  
of a day.

All the life on Earth besides literate human beings  
has never had such a calendar to which to refer—  
it only has had the Sun, the Moon, the planets, and the stars  
to guide them.

That is, it could only directly observe and respond  
to the change in the Moon’s appearance and position,  
the change in the day length,  
the change in the angle of the Sun with the Horizon,  
and the position of the stars and bright planets at night,  
just as early, pre-calendar humanity did.

As mysterious as Gravity, there is another invisible force  
we simply call Love which, in one degree or another,  
holds all living, feeling beings together.

Love creates “Home,” with all its emotional associations,  
whether in the form of a human’s house, an animal’s den,  
or a bird’s nest.

Love and Home are the mechanism for the propagation and survival of conscious life on Earth, and perhaps anywhere in the Universe.

The separation from Home during migrating for wildlife, or when growing up and moving away for humans, creates a yearning or longing to return home and to the seasonal abundance of food there. Some birds fly thousands of kilometers to return to the same valley, to the same farm, to the same yard, to the same tree and indeed, to nearly the same branch of that tree as the year before, to build a new nest home and raise a new set of children to insure the survival of their family.

Many humans are too busy and too urbanized even to notice birds, or much of wildlife, for that matter. Once in a while there are sensitive humans who take a special interest in facilitating the survival of their wildlife friends, in compensation for the endangering of wildlife perpetrated by less sensitive humans. Once in a while wild creatures such as birds create a special bond with the home territory of these sensitive humans. For these humans there is the intense longing for the birds' return each year. For the birds there is the intense longing to return to what they regard as their home.

When the association between a human and a family of birds is particularly intimate and intense, an invisible door is opened into the birds' parallel universe of consciousness, and knowledge that cannot be gained any other way is passed from the birds to the humans.

This book is about just such an association. It is the story of a bird named “Olga” of the Hooded Oriole species who was raised by her human friend who was called “Sheewalker” by the other wild orioles in the neighborhood. Olga had been snatched from her nest by an aggressive bird who in turn accidentally dropped her in the middle of the road. A passing horsewoman quickly picked her up out of the road and took her to Sheewalker, who was known for her ability to raise nestlings.

Sheewalker raised tiny Olga inside the house. Doctor Zhivago’s “Lara’s Theme” was the favorite music of this remarkable bird who, in her subsequent life, migrated to the coastal mountains of western Mexico and then back to Sheewalker’s yard the next year. For the next seven years Olga left each fall with her family and returned the following spring. With each of Olga’s departures Sheewalker, to relieve her despair, quoted the words put to “Lara’s Theme,” “Spring will come again!”

Olga’s life history weaves together the stories in this book. This is her song.

