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### Rebecca's Heart

There was once a lady named Rebecca. She was gifted with beauty, intelligence, and a heart so big that it sometimes felt sad and caused her a lot of pain. Her heart was so full of sadness, in fact, that she could not bear it anymore and decided that she could no longer live on the Earth. She left very quickly, without giving a chance for those who loved her the most to help her. She left unexpectedly and never said goodbye.

Rebecca had not realized how much she meant to those she left behind. She did not fully understand just how much they loved her until she was taken to the heavens. She felt a deep longing to look down upon the Earth from which she came, and she felt at once the overwhelming sorrow and pain that those who loved her were left with. She saw that they were left with holes in their hearts that were aching for her. At once, her heart that was so big was broken for them, and she felt such love for her family and friends that her heart burst and spilled out all over the Earth. As the pieces of her heart touched the Earth they turned into cardinals, with red feathers so bright that anyone who saw them would stop and take in their beauty. For, while all the other animals and birds blend into their surroundings, the cardinal wants to be seen. The cardinal was her way of sending her loved ones a message. Each message was tailor made for each of them. It was a way to appear to them perpetually and let them know that she was sorry for not considering them and for causing them such pain and suffering.

The cardinals took their messages to each of Rebecca's loved ones and friends. For those too feeble to go outside and see them, they appeared outside of windows and tapped on the glass

until they were noticed. For those who were too distracted with life and pain, they would appear in unusual places like the hood of their car or on their mailbox. For those in tune with nature, they would be lurking in every tree, in clusters on the ground and anywhere they could find to get the message across.

When those that were left behind noticed the cardinals, they could tell by the birds' behavior that they were trying to get their attention. They looked forward to seeing these beautiful birds every day; it warmed their hearts. It made them pause for a moment each day to look for their new friends. In doing so, they discovered more beauty in nature. Some were compelled to go outside and sit in the fresh air to be closer to the birds. There was a sense of beauty and hope that came from looking at those little red cardinals. Some made bird feeders to attract more cardinals to their yards, and those too feeble to venture far remembered the saying, "When cardinals are near, angels appear." They had heard somewhere that, when you see them, you should make a wish and blow them a kiss.

This message was shared with Rebecca's family and friends, and as a result many wishes were made, and many kisses were blown to the little red feathered friends. Hearts were a little softer and the holes in them were a little smaller when they realized that the cardinal stood as a symbol of hope and a message from a lost loved one. In time, they were able to make peace and were finally able to say goodbye. But they never forgot; they always had a hole in their hearts for Rebecca, and when the pain was more than they could bear, they would see a cardinal and it reminded them to pause and enjoy life. It reminded them to take in the beauty of nature, and they would make a wish; a wish to be strong even when the pain was too much to bear, and they would then blow a kiss to the red bird and send love, love to Rebecca.

Rebecca's loved ones spread the message of the cardinal to everyone they knew. The message spread far and wide, and is now known in many different parts of the world. Now the

cardinal stands as a symbol of the heart. It is the broken heart that can be restored with love. It is the pieces of the hearts of those who have left us too soon, and their apologies. They are giving us a chance to say goodbye and make peace. They are sent from the spirit world with a message for us all.

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## Appendix 1: Artist Statement

My myth, “Rebecca’s Heart” is personal for me. The symbol of the cardinal reminds me of my grandmother, who was an important part of my life. I am honored that I could also use this symbol in my myth to offer hope and closure and be reminded of another important person in my life, Rebecca, who is represented in this story. I dedicate this story to both of them and their memories.

For as long as I can remember, the cardinal has been a positive symbol in my life. When I was growing up, I spent a lot of time with my grandmother, and she always blew kisses to red birds and told me that they were good luck. Every time she saw one, she would blow it a kiss. It taught me to notice cardinals and think of them in a positive way. When considering what theories I could use in my myth and having learned about Semiotics during the course, I knew right away that I would use the cardinal in my myth. I did not know how much symbolism (Riera) there was behind the cardinal until I was doing this project. Realizing that the cardinal could be a message from a lost loved one (Wendt) was very powerful for me especially since I was planning to use it to symbolize a message about a person who leaves the Earth unexpectedly.

Suicide is a tough subject to talk about but just as the cardinal is bright red and stands out and you can’t ignore it, this issue cannot be ignored. There are so many families dealing with this issue. When a loved one decides to leave this Earth, it is hard on the ones left behind because one cannot have closure. Family members do not get a chance to help or say goodbye and it does leave a hole in their hearts, a hole that is always asking what they could have done or said to change their loved one's mind.

By looking at the cardinal as a message (Wendt) from those that left us way too soon and being able to blow the cardinal a kiss, it is a positive action. It is a small action, but it is a way for us to find meaning in nature and a way to say goodbye. The cardinal can bring us outside and

into a world of fresh air and lovely scenery that is good for our minds. When dealing with losing a family member, we need to look for ways to heal and find closure.

The Utopian Theory (Vieira) is a perfect fit for “Rebecca’s Heart” because it gives hope to those who are left behind. It offers people who have lost a loved one unexpectedly a way to find the closure they need by imagining they have a way to say goodbye. I decided to keep my myth short, but the words were carefully chosen. I hope that those reading the story find it complete and uplifting and that it paints a picture of hope.

## Appendix 2: Critical Reflection

According to the World Health Organization, “700,000 people die by suicide each year, which is one person every 40 seconds (“Mental Health”).” Although there are no statistics showing the number of people who are devastated by the unexpected loss of their loved one, we can imagine that it is an overwhelming number.

There was a time when the world was filled with hope and optimism for the future. Young people had an opportunity to dream big dreams and accomplish them. What happened? Why are the young and old and everyone in between battling depression, contemplating suicide, and choosing suicide as a way out? Is there a way to turn this problem around? Can we stop the endless publishing of obituaries that say, “died unexpectedly?” Can we change our perspective on life to offer renewed hope and positivity for ourselves and our society (Vieira)?

“Rebecca’s Heart” is a modern myth written to address those who are left behind, those who are in search of answers and healing, those who need closure. The story offers us a visual, a symbol (Riera) of the broken hearted. This symbol represents not only those who have chosen to leave the Earth before their time but those who are still here and trying to make sense of what happened. The cardinal, with its bright red color, is hard to ignore. It is interesting to note that when you search for cardinal symbolism (Riera), it represents “hope, wisdom, blessings, or that they are angels with a divine message for you.” Animal communicator Ruthy Doolittle says that cardinals are a symbol of change. “It can mean a huge shift in your life which could sometimes be viewed as an ending. (Wendt)” Doolittle goes on to say that “if you are noticing cardinals, it is quite possible that someone from the spirit world is trying to reach you (Wendt).” There is also a popular quote that says, “When cardinals appear, angels are near (Hobson)” that I included in the myth. My hope was to use a familiar quote to further express the idea that Rebecca was trying to communicate with her loved ones.

Using the cardinal (Riera) to represent the hearts of those who are gone and as a symbol of hope and healing is the goal of this modern myth. It offers a utopian vision (Vieira) by sending positive thoughts and love to our loved ones to whom we never got to say a proper goodbye. When we see a cardinal, no matter where we are on this journey of life, we can be reminded that leaving too soon will cause pain to our loved ones. We are here for a reason, and we all have a purpose. If we leave without our mission being fulfilled, then holes will be left not only in the hearts of those here now but even for those who have not even been born. This realization alone could change a person's perspective; it could drag them out of depression and cause them to look for opportunities to make their mark on the world. Instead of leaving behind a legacy of pain, they could start to ask themselves what good they could do.