

# The Birds: 2 poems

written by Guest Contributor | August 8, 2019



## Scattering the Locks

### I.

She's humming on the porch swing:

*Some glad morning when this life is o'er, I'll Fly Away*

Her hair hangs like a long dark mystery  
waist length, the color of coal.  
She keeps it twisted,  
pinned in a bun  
to the back of her head.

Too hot when hanging down,  
I ask her, why not cut it?  
*Your daddy likes it long, she says.*  
So my mother lives with this length  
for a long time.

She keeps humming:

*Just a few more weary days and then, I'll Fly Away*

One steamy summer afternoon  
she sits fanning, sweating,  
asks me to fetch scissors.

I slice thick locks of  
cast iron color, and  
they fall as crow feathers on wind.

She thinks it odd that I gather them and  
carry the locks west  
to sleep in cities, Seattle, San Francisco.

### II.

Southern locks lie sleeping  
in my cold North drawer,  
waiting and knowing  
what I could not have known:  
How much I would need her locks  
once she was gone.

*When the shadows of this life have grown, I'll Fly Away*

She slips into lilac scented spring dawn  
before I can reach her  
I must cross  
The Continental Divide  
Saint Louis,  
Dark hollows, Great Stone Face  
and Elk Knob.

I call but no one answers the phone:

*Like a bird from prisons bars has flown, I'll Fly Away*

She flies and I feel her coming to me  
carried on wings of wonder.

She arrives and I open the drawer,  
lift the locks, ready myself for release.

*I'll Fly Away, Oh Glory, I'll Fly Away  
When I die, hallelujah by and by, I'll Fly Away*

### III.

I don't view the body  
I don't attend the funeral  
I don't receive the ashes,  
I scatter the locks.

First in the park where I last heard her voice,  
for nesting robins and chickadees  
and in the cemetery near my home.

*To a land where joys shall never end, I'll Fly Away*

Next in water:  
Lake Washington, Puget Sound  
Pacific Ocean, and my backyard.

She never traveled far from the family farm,  
or wished to fly on an airplane, preferred train.  
But we never boarded together.  
She never came west,  
only in her dreams.

*To a home on God's Celestial Shore, I'll Fly Away*

Now her locks lie scattered around the world:  
Maui Black Rock, Hong Kong and Dark Continent.

I carry her always with me,  
in locks of hair, DNA,  
cellular memory,  
my own mystery.

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## **Buzzard's Roost**

In late summer light we hike  
high above the tree line  
in land of long, slow vowels and blue ridges,  
past cow pies and horse flies.

Then we see them:  
vultures roosting on limestone boulders-  
timeless as we are.

Their forefathers and ours  
once hunted bison in the valley below.

The bison are gone now,  
mountain tops removed and  
the old homestead an abandoned coalmine.

We peer down with the winged witnesses,  
all of us surviving on leftovers.

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*featured photo by Jean Kercheval, website: [www.kerchevalphotography.com](http://www.kerchevalphotography.com)*