

The Birds: 3 Poems

written by Guest Contributor | August 15, 2017



The Swimming Birds

The top of the lake
Is a solid white slab
Seared through
With hairline cracks.

Because of people,
Because of strolling,
The top of the lake
Also has

Roast meat on a stick,
Flipping egg pancakes,
Steamed buns the color of snow
And hot potatoes,

Which are brown loafs eaten in hand,
In mouth,
Until only the steaming, dirty skins
Remain.
Trampled and submerged,
Sweet potato skins
Line the bottom of all
Chinese lakes.

A hole in the ice, cleared and set apart
Sprouts a ladder.
The old men in trunks and matching caps
Their fleshy stomachs curling in the cold.

A crowd gathers.
Beijingers wrapped up in leather coats, plastic earmuffs.
In high heeled boots.
The first snow of the New Year.
The old men also tend the birds.
They walk them in carved wood cages,

And hang them from bare trees
While chatting.

Fish are sold on the street in plastic tubs.
Darting schools, they follow the same circle.
Black fins move like a young woman's hair,
Freshly combed.

When there are no birds, no fish,
And even the small, caged rabbits
(Gifts for children)
Slip away,

The old men stay,
Swimming circles in the water,
Singing as they thaw,
Like birds.

Poem to a Bird

I found a little bird,
And I bid her come to me.

Step out from out your house, your home.
These trees, this wild grass.

Survey the land and make wind chat
As if in the presence of firsts.

Be unhurried,
Easy.

You do not need to worry about finding your way back.
You have been here a thousand years.

Free Range

Take care your fool heart
Your birdsong.
These sheer buckshots of meat,
Straining at the clutch
For the gas,
The open road.
Observe how quickly trees and houses pass

Their little bricks and hardened fences, their leaves.

Observe how immediate it is now noon,
Then midnight,
Now noon again and then,
Without even meaning to—it is midnight.

Your heart is the cage in your chest,
Pounding the bone bars,
Its one simple demand:
More time locked inside.



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