

The Birds: Sisterbird

written by Guest Contributor | September 14, 2021



featured photo by Ama Bucher / @amaluegt

* * *

Sisterbird, barn owl screeches, scratches, knocks and knocks – now I spoiled it. All a muddle. Just came out.

Sorry.

* * *

Second try.

Faye, she's sneaky, leaves her bed to roam about. Stay in bed, whispers mommy, good girls need to sleep at night. I do, sleep so deep it feels like floating. Morning dawns: mommy pats my head, gives Faye a hug.

Her bed is left, mine is right. The stars on my ceiling glow like jellyfish. I like to count them, dream of space and of the sea, black holes, blue whales, aurora borealis. Faye has paper cranes above, they wiggle when she breathes and giggles, light as feathers. Peter helped her fold them.

Can I try?

No, he's my dad, not yours.

I kicked the table, was sent to bed.

* * *

Faye has long red hair. Mommy likes to braid it, brush it, until it gleams and glistens. Faye's got freckles on her nose. Like ladybugs, says mommy. Faye's dress is pink and blue, graceful princess, good at school. Never lets me play with her set of dainty china cups, white with dark blue flowers, even though I'm older and more careful.

Once I broke one when she was not around, hid the shards in her favorite pair of shoes, muttered curses. Mommy was not happy, took my dolls, no dinner.

* * *

Faye gets out of bed at night, thinking me asleep. I'm not, just have my eyes closed and pretend that I'm dead and buried. She tiptoes, sneakily. I open my eyes just a crack.

Faye's on the windowsill, nightshirt waving at the stars, hair a nervous flutter.

Faye spreads her arms wide, wingspan, crisscross, vanishes. Screeching from the fir trees, whoosh, goodbye. I stare and dream of flying, but I can't, I've tried. Bruises, scratches, mommy put a plaster on my knee, told me not to cause a scene. Faye smiled behind her hands.

* * *

Morning dawns. Mouse in her beak, feathers rustling, eyes shining like dead rocks on snow before she's Faye again. Blood dries under her nails. Where have you been, I whisper and she smiles, falls asleep smelling of the forest.

* * *

Mommy winks and says, Of course. And you, my love, you are a pocket mouse, quick and nimble, up and down, flurry-scurry.

No, I say, a girl. What were they called before the barns?

Mommy laughs. This is no joking matter, though. I read it in the library: ghosts and demons and all things bad.

* * *

Faye gets out of bed at night, tiptoe, pitter-patter. I'm wide awake, right behind her. I see everything: body shrinking, feathers sprouting, beak and claws and big round eyes. Quick as lightning – screeching, laughing, off she goes. It smells like spring, grass is dancing, trees are creaking.

Can I come, I whisper once she's back. Show me how. I want to learn.

Faye giggles. Of course you can't, you're too heavy. Where are your wings?

Teach me!

I'll put dead mice on your pillow, nincompoop.

* * *

She's on the windowsill, nightshirt waving, hair too, flags, rags, bedsheets. Faye's a miracle. I am no pocket mouse, just a girl fast asleep at night, the way good girls are.

Bring me a mouse, I whisper, sisterbird, and then I latch the window fast and steady, tie a ribbon for good luck.

Screeching, scratching, knocking, knocking.

Beak on glass.

Knocking.

I am a corpse, and those don't hear, too much dirt within their heads.

And then it's silent, cranes are still. Empty bed with ruffled downs.

Good morning, sunshine, time to rise.

* * *



Sara Bucher is a writer from Switzerland, currently studying for an MA in Creative Writing at the University of Auckland.