

RON BURCH

A Bird Beats Against the Window

My girlfriend is screaming, her head down between her hands as it rustles by her, smashing into the window. Trapped in our living room is the bird. I don't know how it got in here but it doesn't matter now. It is here. It is trapped. It wants out and we don't know what to do.

"Open the door," she screams. She is dressed for work, a job for the government, but she shields her head. I open the apartment door but the bird doesn't seem to notice. Instead it sets itself for the window, for where it sees freedom. Not the door. But the window. It bangs up again, causing my girlfriend to cringe and bend her mouth in a way I've never seen before.

Get it out of here, she screams. I'm trying, I yell back. Before the bird, the two of us weren't even speaking.

I try to put myself in front of the bird. To stop it from flying into the window before it kills itself but it avoids me. I am not what it wants. It wants the window. It is a wild animal. Not domesticated. Not thinking. Reacting. Moving toward freedom. I am only an obstacle in its way. So it flies above me and I jump up and try to catch it, the bird, a small solid black bird with yellow eyes, black wings around me, crashing again into the window. But it doesn't stun itself. It doesn't lie there for me to grab.

It bounces off and flies around the room again, again terrifying my girlfriend. I assume she is afraid of birds. I don't think I knew that until now. We have never spoke about it and she says she is daring. She owns a motorcycle that she barely rides. But now she cowers from the bird. Because it flies? I don't know why. Because maybe she thinks it to be unclean or perhaps just the image of flight itself is too much for her, too wild, too unknown.

She says to me, this bird has been in here before. Bullshit, I reply, waving my arms around as if to guide the bird. I've seen it before, she says.

We could throw food down, I think. Perhaps I have some sunflower seeds or maybe some nuts from a can. A piece of fruit or a vegetable. Get it to land so I can try to catch it. But I don't know what it would take. I wonder if it likes peanut butter.

Instead, I run to the hall closet where the bathroom supplies are and I remove a clean white towel. I have heard that you can towel birds. Throw the towel over it even as it is in mid-flight to bring it down and then gather the towel around it, to calm the wings, to slow down its quickly beating heart, its rasping breath that comes from fear and exertion.

But I can't get the towel over it and where it now smashes there are red splotches of blood, dotting our wall. My girlfriend screams and runs from the room and I jump at the bird, dropping the towel, trying to catch it with my hands, to stop the blood, to calm the frantic beating of its tiny heart.

Here! my girlfriend yells and I turn to see her standing behind me. My Louisville Slugger bat curled in her hand. She thrusts it at me.

Kill it, she says. I won't kill it, I reply.

The bird flutters around us and hits the wall, sliding against it, a red smear. Kill it, she says again.

The bird takes off and I cannot bear to see more of its blood and I swing, but instead of at the bird, I swing at the window, breaking through the glass with a terrible crash, leaving long shards erupting from the pane. The bird, sensing the space, freedom itself, flaps through the oval hole and back outside, disappearing into the nearby trees.

I turn to her and she looks guilty. What else could we do? she asks. You didn't have any other options, she says, disappointedly and leaves the apartment. I pick up pieces of the broken glass and look out the window, searching the trees, to see if I can see any sign of the bird but it is long gone.

Ron Burch's first novel, *Bliss Inc.*, was published by BlazeVOX Books; Aqueous Books is publishing his flash-fiction collection, *Menagerie*, in 2015. He lives in Los Angeles. Please visit: www.ronburch.net.