

"The Girl's Bird," Grades 11-12, 5 pages

She woke with a startle, her usual serene surroundings slightly disturbed by a faint rapping on her bedroom window. She coughed a few times, cleared her throat, then took a deep breath and exhaled. As she was taking her time to get out of bed, the noise became a sort of background noise; it was beginning to blend with the rest of her familiar surroundings, leading her to nearly forget why she was making all of this effort to begin with. Looking down at the clock on her bedside table, she determined that it was slightly after 3AM. What a lousy time to be awakened, she thought. Finally, she grabbed for the wall and shuffled over to her window. At first glance, there was nothing there. Then the noise started up again, and she saw where it was coming from.

A beautiful white dove was tapping on the window with its petite beak. She had never seen such an exquisite, pure-looking creature. Why was it there for her, she wondered. It seemed to have some sort of agenda, the way it looked at her with such purpose in its eyes. Curious, she reached for the latch of the window, but stopped just as she were about to unlock it, fearing another coughing fit. She paused briefly, frozen in place to stave off the feeling. Once it was clear she would be okay that time, she unlatched the window, and it swung open, as if some force had acted upon it. The dove just sat there, looking at her curiously. It waddled ever so delicately into her room, hopped onto her night stand, and curled up, tucking its head under its left wing. Baffled, the girl had no other idea for what to do other than to just go back to sleep. It must just be some sort of odd dream, she had convinced herself.

When she woke up, the room was awfully cold. She turned towards the window, and saw that it was open. Having come to the sudden realization that the events of last night were real, and that there might be serious repercussions on her health due to the draft, she opened her mouth to call for help. Before any sound came out, she succumbed to another coughing fit. When she finally composed herself, she saw the dove from the night before sitting on her lap.

"Who are you? What do you want?" the girl asked, somewhat irritated. The dove just tilted its head quizzically, and she sighed. Birds can't understand humans, can they? She tentatively reached out with her right hand, wondering if it would let her touch it. As the dove started to back up and slightly flutter its wings in disapproval, she noticed a small black spot on the dove's back. To her surprise, once she redirected her attention to that, the dove did not try to flee when

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she touched the discoloration. After lightly rubbing the spot like one would an irritating smudge on paper, it became apparent that it was a natural occurrence. "Not so pure after all, hm?" she sneered at the dove. It still appeared to have no idea of what she was saying, so she pretended she said nothing and frowned to herself. Suddenly, the family maid barged into the room.

"Oh so sorry dear, I'm a few minutes late I see. It's nice to see you awake on your own. This is your medication for today, and I'll put your glass of water right here. I'll have your breakfast ready and brought to you very soon!" She was on her way out almost as quickly as she had appeared. After the girl swallowed her pills and stifled another coughing fit, she turned back to face her lap and the dove was gone. The girl just held her head with both hands and muttered to herself that the new medication must be making her go crazy, that's all. Not knowing what to do with the rest of her time before breakfast, she drew for a while on scrap sheets of paper that were normally strewn around her room for availability on spur of the moment occasions. She loved to draw, but lately she had no inspiration. When breakfast came there was no news, as usual, from her maid on the whereabouts of her parents. Someone must be paying that kind woman, she knew, but she didn't quite know who or where they were.

The next day, the dove woke her up in a startling way. Feeling as though she were drowning in her dreams, the young girl suddenly sat up, gasping for air, and the dove toppled off of her face. When she finally caught her breath, she was thoroughly confused.

"What are you doing here again, and why were you suffocating me, you crazy bird??" she wheezed hurriedly. The dove simply shook like dogs do when wet, took its time walking to the foot of her bed, then seemed to have fallen asleep on the foot-board. Once she collected herself and was able to calm down, she remembered that the first thing she saw when she woke was an array of large black splotches on white. After watching the dove rest peacefully, she dismissed the idea. The only black currently visible to her was the spot she had noticed before.

Hm...but...had it grown bigger?

As the days went by, the dove appeared by her side more and more often. She had gotten the maid to close the window for her after the first incident, but the bird seemed to have taken up

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residency in her room. Surprisingly, it left no messes, and the girl came to the conclusion that it could only be seen by her, since the maid never reacted to the sight of it. Its very existence seemed fleeting, like hers, and she took comfort in that. Though she did wonder why this beautiful snow-white dove was so quickly being covered by this tar-black color. To her, it was as if it were being devoured by some kind of darkness while being blissfully unaware of it. "Mom is an ornithologist....I'll ask her when she gets back," the girl would repeat in her head every time it came to mind. Sometimes it would end with "if she gets back," and she would have to stop herself from thinking such thoughts by humming cheerful tunes, but that would irritate her throat and cause her chest to act up. She couldn't afford to be negative.

The next afternoon, she was feeling very lethargic and achy. The maid had brought the local nurse on call to check on her, but she wasn't of much help. Her advice basically amounted to "just have some soup and stay on your meds." She was used to this, so it didn't bother her. Besides, she liked soup. When she was about ready to go to sleep that night, she felt a tugging at her right pajama-top sleeve and looked down. It was none other than the mysterious dove she now considered to be hers, and her only friend. Even though the lighting was dim and her vision seemed to be worsening somehow, she could tell that it was almost all black now. And...had the beak increased in size?

"Bird, why don't you fly away? I can open the window for you. Be free. You can go anywhere, while I'm stuck here. Won't you let me live through your adventures?" To her surprise, the bird suddenly seemed very displeased. It turned away from her, hopped off her bed, and disappeared underneath it. She did not see it again until the next week.

By that time, her condition was deteriorating rapidly. There was no longer any color in her skin. She could hardly speak, hardly breath. Her vision was failing and her strength was nonexistent. She used to be a beautiful young girl was now almost a literal shell of her former self, appearing as if her soul was basically waiting to leave her body. The maid commented, with a look of pity in her eyes, that she looked as though she were constantly walking the line between life and death.

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She had finally given up on her parents coming back to her. The maid even came to visit her less often, only showing herself when it was to bring foods, though at this point nothing could really stay down. Most of the time she didn't even have the strength to swallow her pills. She realized she was not going to get better. Thinking back on her life, she started to cry, but no tears would come out. She was far too dehydrated. Just as she was beginning to hope that things would finally end, she felt something soft brush her right cheek. She turned her head, and through weak vision she saw the dove beside her.

"Oh...is that you? I thought you were done with me." No response, understandably. "Look at you," she began to giggle faintly. "You're all black now, like you got dipped in tar. You silly little thing." She didn't have enough strength to laugh anymore and instead smiled feebly.

"Say....You know what? I've never seen your wings spread out. Please...for me...can I see your beautiful wings?" She weakly extended a hand toward the bird, but it didn't make it very far. As her eyes began to close and she gave up struggling to move her arm any closer, the last thing she saw was a pair of extraordinarily beautiful large black wings enveloping her.

The maid was the only person who attended her burial besides the graveyard staff. Afterwards, a family or two from the area would sometimes come by her grave to pay their respects, though they didn't stay long and had never even cared to visit the lonely girl while she was alive. To most of the residents in the area, the girl had been considered a ghost already. She had hardly ever left the home, and her parents were never around. No one had wanted to bother making connections with someone they knew wouldn't last much longer. It would just have been unnecessary effort on their part.

Atop the girl's tombstone perched a lackluster black crow, looking forlornly down at the ground. Unnoticed, it was able to survey the area, and watch all who visited, yet sense no real sympathy. It shook its head, as if in disapproval, and laid down to begin preening its feathers, more and more of them silently fluttering down onto the girl's grave as time went by. After some time, it stopped. Its eyes appeared to be glazing over, yet were brimming with emotion. If it were at all possible, the crow would have been shedding tears. It looked down at the freshly-filled hole in the ground, gazed back up at the sky, and then the young girl's bird settled down and fell asleep

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for the last time.