

## NOT NECESSARILY A BIRD POEM

### AN UNKINDNESS OF RAVENS

It is the sound drawing them  
into the rarefied space  
that is her undoing.  
Expecting *Ave Maria* or  
maybe *Amazing Grace*  
to breach the gap  
between her,  
and the wretch laid out—  
novitiate, near-perfect—  
in the plainest casket available,  
save for the Order's ideogram,  
carved—or is it stamped,  
she cannot decide—on the lid.  
Instead it's Albinoni's *Adagio*  
that clings to her senses,  
invades her every pore;  
each note a leech, a remora  
eclipsing her promise to God,  
to herself, to create a calmness  
no matter how difficult  
that might prove to be.

Ah, here come the rest—  
such an obsolete group,  
she cannot help thinking—  
as habit-clad figure after  
habit-clad figure flutters  
down the aisles looking  
like crows or, faces framed  
wimple white, perhaps magpies.  
No - ignore the white, she  
decides - so stern looking,  
ravens surely.  
She tries to reel her mind  
back to the matter  
at hand, as the others  
perch on pews.  
The music ends,  
the priest intones a prayer,  
beseeches all to consider  
the virtue of the deceased.

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She feels light-headed -  
wonders at the man's  
audacity, then remembers  
it is her time of the month  
and ponders anew,  
God's cruelty.  
Why continue the cycle  
yet insist on celibacy?  
It didn't lessen the deceased  
suffering did it?  
She crosses herself quickly,  
says a quick, sincere, "Hail Mary".  
Tries to forget the choice  
that led to the poor thing  
landing in the box.  
She cannot, however,  
keep from regarding  
her Savior on the cross,  
finds herself begging  
him silently,  
"Why *this* dear Lord?"  
*Her* child was *your* child  
also, was *it* not?"  
As always, the reply:  
silence.

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### SAID THE KETTLE OF HAWKS

The night you were fading, the doctor said, no,  
it was your age, you would be fine by morning,  
but there was something so casual in his voice—  
I didn't trust his voice, but I did trust him.

So, I set off for a walk up by the lake, solid ice right then.  
Just as I arrived, a great number of birds; hawks, it turned out,  
startled from the low shore bushes, began to wheel around  
in the air above me. I'd never seen such a thing.

First of all—hawks don't flock, as far as I know—  
They pair, yes ... flock? No.  
But these were at least a dozen or more—and silent—  
At first.  
They dove, then took the sky, then back, coming  
close to where I stood—staring at me,  
in that sideways fashion birds have— you know?

Shocked, I couldn't move, just stood there  
watching them even as they began to shriek  
at me, and they *were* addressing me.  
There was no-one else around, human or otherwise.  
The birds were agitated; if it had been any  
other time of year, not winter, I might have  
thought they were protecting a nest.

Their swirling got faster and the noise louder.  
Then—as suddenly as they had started, they  
swooped straight up in the air and were gone.  
I didn't see where they went; they were just ... gone.  
In the silent aftermath, I felt gooseflesh on my  
arms, and *knew*, I needed to go to my mother.

I went back home, got in my car, and drove  
straight to the hospital.  
I realized as I drove, I was surrendering  
to the birds, giving over any rational thoughts  
I might have had.  
I was in time to sit with my mother, hold her  
hand when she died.

## **NOT NECESSARILY A BIRD POEM**

### **STORM ANGELS**

Out of the soup that is refinery row's contribution to the dish called sunrise,  
Edmonton's skyline wavers—a pulsing mirage.

A dressing—equal parts pollution and pure prairie air—bathes the Tarmac,  
as flocks of silver birds grab the sky, one after the other

hoisting the citizenry and visitors alike—too many to count—  
miles above the earth, ferrying them to points undisclosed.

There is a charm to these thunderous angels,  
these miracles that defy gravity, and spit in God's eye.

Like homing pigeons or peace doves, they carry messages of hope,  
remind souls there's more to life than storm fronts.

## NOT NECESSARILY A BIRD POEM

### DESCENT OF A PHOENIX

Below our tiny basket  
The Nile serpentine,  
A ribbon of gold  
Beneath another day  
Being birthed as Ra,  
Round as a pregnant  
Woman's belly, surfaces  
Slowly into a perfect  
Sky, as if into a calm  
Sea -

Although we are many  
In the basket  
We are hushed  
Made dumb no doubt  
By such sacred sights:  
Luxor's valley of the kings  
Tombs older  
Than time, than death

The only sound we hear:  
An occasional incongruous roar  
As the pilot sends a fiery jet  
Of helium into the massive  
Hot-air balloon above us  
A balloon with a ruby phoenix  
Stenciled on both its sides  
Is keeping us aloft as we  
Take this god's eye trip  
At dawn

Too soon we are nearing  
the end of our journey  
The pilot reminds us again,  
The landing procedure will  
Likely be a bumpy time  
But we're not to worry  
He will throw out cables  
A ground crew will race after us  
And grasp the ropes quickly  
Finally bringing us to a stop  
All we need do, is hold on.

## **NOT NECESSARILY A BIRD POEM**

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The last thing I remember  
As we begin our descent -  
Is thinking, "This is so perfect  
So beautiful, and I am in awe  
If I were to die right now  
I would be utterly content, happy..."

This poem is based on an actual event - the crash of a hot-air balloon at Luxor, Egypt Wed. morning which tragically ended in 19 deaths, plus 2 or 3 serious injuries. Some of the details of the poem are fictional, such as the description of the balloon, but others - such as the landing procedure - are pretty close to accurate. I have been a hot-air balloonist and while I can appreciate the lure, it's also not my favourite thing to do. My heart goes out to those who lost people in this horrific accident.

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### ROADSIDE FALLEN ANGEL

Discovered defrocked and desperate by the side of a little-used road,  
she was barely breathing and had she not been trying to spread them—  
her tattered, torn wings; those appendages so battered they no longer  
appeared to be what they once were, and operated not a bit—

He might not have noticed her at all, might have taken her for rags,  
thrown like so much trash to litter the roadways, but he saw the scrabbling,  
awkward motions her scrawny wings were making and they brought him  
out of his preoccupied trance; made him slow down, take a closer look.

"Oh my word," he breathed the words. "What have we here?" He pulled over, got out,  
and walked back to stare down at the creature - not quite human, but no heavenly one,  
not this poor thing. He squatted beside her, put out a hand to touch her head.  
She shrank back from his hand, enormous eyes full of fear, her wing-things trembling.

He took off his coat and mumbling vague reassurances, wrapped it around her gently,  
scooped her up, ignoring her mewling and sounds of pain. He knew what to do.  
He would take her home to join the others; he had wings for her back at his place.  
He kept telling her everything would be alright, she would be put together again.

And he kept his promise...when she awoke at his place, she was cleaned up and sparkling  
and she had wonderful new wings with a spread so wide she could barely believe it.  
Her saviour had placed a mirror before her so that she could look at all her beauty  
and it quite took her breath away; there was however, the matter of her body.

Her wings and her face were quite remarkable - lovelier than ever in fact.  
But she couldn't see her body, nor feel it actually, and she couldn't move at all.  
Now that she thought about it, she couldn't move her head or her wings either.  
It was then that she noticed all the other winged ones in the room - birds, butterflies.

The man was whistling as he left the room, but she couldn't find the words to ask him  
what she knew instinctively already; her wings were lovely, but clipped.  
She was an angel who would fly no more .  
She suspected tears were falling down her cheeks, but she felt nothing.