

Bird Noises

by Sophie Xiong

"CAW"

"CAW CAW"

The tea was not ready but I went outside. They had come in screeching. It was deafening.

My husband had been kicked out of his house for disrespecting his father, so he rebuked this gesture by making an even grander gesture. He decided to move to an enemy state. During this mucky youthful period, I was squandering a few years. I decided to test love with this man. With half-convincing reasons and a deliberate strut, I walked out on my family to be with him.

"We can start over, Christine. Listen to me." His mantra was simple. In this hypnotic state, I had fallen prey to a slew of idiotic decisions. Let's buy this robin's egg blue furniture. Okay. Let's buy this album full of wren songs. Uh, okay. We'll be ready to fly to Bird France next month.

Birds had taken over France and engineered bird-people.

I realized the consequences of my experiment too late.

Shut my front door, and I was at peace. The weather was beautiful in Bird France.

Avian trends had gripped its talons on the world. Feathers were the top accessory, unnecessary wings second. English even incorporated pieces of the new bird-people language. "Ca-caw" translated to "birdfeeder" which meant "terrible but fast food."

"CAW CAW CAW" translated to "wing under wing" which meant "capitalism."

I learned a few obligatory words. Hello, caw. Goodbye, caw. I need to use the nestroom, caw.

I chewed on seeds my son bought me for my birthday. A cloud obscured the front lawn from the mollifying warmth of the sun. As quickly as it invaded, the cloud flew away.

Trevor made sure he was on the tarmac with flowers from a convenience store the moment I landed. The particularly new language had been quiet murmurs at first; I had been in a plane. I was lulled to sleep by soft chirps. But the first thing I heard as I entered the airport was the shrieking.

"Are you okay?" He kept asking me. I did not speak in the car because the radio was on. None of the noise made sense. The rhythm of speech was unfamiliar. I could not tell if the voices were asking questions or making jokes. I laughed when the taxi driver laughed.

The lawn was covered with twigs and leaves. I began raking. Gathering the piles of twigs and leaves, I forgot the kettle had been on. Its exhausted whistle continued as the piles combined, it continued as my daughter opened the door to find me.'

My husband had always spoken English to me. The children, at first, as well. Then they started paying more attention to the television, rather than me. And the television loved to imitate the sounds of a toucan. I asked my daughter what it meant, and she sighed and said something vague, barely looking at me. I stood watching her. She nodded methodically to the thudding flap of the toucan wings, pulverizing wind into the microphone.

"Water done," she said.

"Excellent," I replied, "Will you do me the honor of taking the kettle off of whatever surface it was that made it so hot. So hot, in fact, that it would boil." She had turned away and walked back into the house before I finished. She was adjusting her headphones.

All the blemishes of lawn had been forced into a large circle. I wanted to make smoke signals. I wanted to build a fire and control the whirling tumbling smoke for someone I did not know to see.

I had matches but the twigs and leaves still had resistance left over from being part of a living tree. My thumb became white-burnt from holding each match to its cardboard end. Nothing caught on fire. I retreated back indoors, leaving the rake immobile, clawing the pile of refuse.

