

The Bird

by Steven Gowin

Once I hunted pheasant on Thanksgiving.

I was a senior in high school and couldn't be around the family much although I loved them. So I decided to hunt. We lived on the edge of a tiny Iowa town, and picked corn fields were steps away.

A quarter mile from the house, I chased up a pheasant just by the Rock Island tracks, but I didn't get my shot off and the damned thing flew across the river parallel to the tracks and into one of John Jungman's corn fields on the other side of the Raccoon.

The bridge was half a mile behind me, but I wasn't ready to go home that morning anyway, and it was cold and bright and blue and clear, so I walked the south side of the river back to the bridge and crossed the mighty "Coon" and walked back west on the north side of the river to Jungman's stubbly corn on the raccoon bottoms.

Almost due north of where I'd kicked the bird up, 500 yards from where I'd seen it in the first place, I scared it up again. That whistling percussive wing noise terrified me, but I somehow leveled the 20 gauge and fired.

Mom cleaned the bird and roasted it with black pepper. It was a little dry but wonderfully wild and the best Thanksgiving fowl ever. None of it could be better.

I never hunted again.

