

The Gods Are Small Birds

by Peter Morrison

Leif Tanisha gets called Bird by friends, due to the coop in the garden which is full of the winged creatures. Each day he feeds them, waters them, cleans out their cages, does everything that needs to be done to make sure they are taken care of - he is attentive to a level that his friends respect but don't understand. But that's ok with Bird, he is happy, sees it all as more than just a hobby.

This morning Bird wakes with excitement, anticipation for the first day of Spring fills him, and he throws himself into the day. Carefully he washes and shaves, making sure his face and his skull are smooth. Then he breaks his fast, says his prayers, and makes the preparations for the ritual of Spring, of release.

When the door to the coop opens the birds erupt, they are expecting to be fed, that is how it works every day. But not today, not quite, not yet. He walks the length of the room, inspecting his collection. Checking each bird, looking into it's eyes, looking into it's soul. Finally after careful consideration, he makes his selection, he picks one cage off of it's hook, and carries the bird outside. The rest of the birds protest, why are you not feeding us, they chirp at him. He turns to them, and bows, later my friends, later.

At the back of his garden there is a low fence, on the other side there are fields, crops spreading out, which will hopefully be harvested for food when the time is right. There is a pole that sticks up from the fence, with a hook attached at the top, he hangs the cage with the bird he has selected from this hook. It eyes him silently, unsure what he intends to do, unaware of this annual ritual that he performs each year.

Bird takes a handful of seed, throws it over the fence. Bird takes a dish of water, throws it over the fence. All the while he says the words of the spring ritual, the ritual which will bring a strong harvest, the ritual which encourages a good life. He nods to himself when he is done, content that he has carried out the procedure satisfactorily. At last he opens the cage, the bird doesn't need any prompting, it takes the opening and is free.

Bird watches as it explores its space, then he watches as it turns. Another small god, outraged by its

captivity. It comes howling at Bird, determined to strike down the mortal who kept a god in a cage. But it is repelled by the boundary between the garden and the field, finds itself turned around. It tries again, determined, and fails again. This time it takes the hint, accepts its freedom, and flies out, across the fields, delivering Spring to the world.

Bird smiles, his hands in his pockets, relaxed and pleased. Watching while the little god flies away never to be seen by him again. Happy that his work is done here today, he returns to the coop, returns to feed the small gods, to take the best care of them he can. Until Spring comes round again and its time to release one into the wild.

The Devil Is A Small Black Cat

Devil, I cry, as he drops a small god on my door step. The god twitches and writhes, its guts torn out, but it struggles still alive. My cat, that black cat Devil, looks at me with pride, expecting me to be delighted by this gift he has delivered to me. At the start of spring people release small gods, like birds from cages, as a blessing, an offering for good luck and a bountiful harvest. They buy the gods down the market, though some, like the man down the road, are god fanciers breed their own gods specially for spring. I sigh, pat Devil on the head, and I lift the god carefully. With a quick motion, I break the god's neck, putting it out its misery. I find a bag in the kitchen, wrap the god & drop it in the outside bin. I wash my hands & Devil rubs up against my leg, purring happily.