

When the Hawk Appears on the Plump, Squat Shrub

When the hawk appears on the plump, squat shrub, most often I soon hear William open the front door to our house. He always finds no one there. “It was you, wasn’t it,” he’ll say to me.

On Thursday, February 24th 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine. That’s worth repeating: *Russia invaded Ukraine*. When Trump speaks of the war with Ukraine, he muddies the waters as to how the war started. But it’s simple: *Russia invaded Ukraine*, a sovereign nation.

The next day, William and I arrived in North Adams in the most northwest corner of my state of Massachusetts. That weekend, we were staying at a boutique hotel called the Porches. With its Victorian architecture and modern amenities, the hotel is actually a row of nineteenth century houses across from MASS MoCA. In our room, that night, with the television on, I listened as President Zelensky addressed the Ukrainian people at the end of this first day of Russia’s attack. I looked out one of the windows and watched the steam rising from the year-round heated outdoor pool and hot tub and felt such despair and sadness for the Ukrainian people. Unprovoked, unexpected, living their lives, common lives, just like ours, when everything changed.

Steam rising. William takes care of my babies. That’s what I call those most common of birds associated with us humans. My babies are those fat, little sparrows that flourish in our

small backyard. The steam rises from our heated bird bath and I watch as they splash and play in the water that William, even in the frigidity of winter, keeps clean and fresh.

I watch them from the east-facing window in my office. I am a writer who sometimes needs to just sit and think or not think. “Are you working?” William will ask when he comes into my room and sees me just staring out the window. He has learned that I could be working, just sitting there.

I watch my babies dart from feeder to feeder, which William always keeps filled, and then, they come to rest on the plump, squat shrub that sits below my window. I think it’s a boxwood. William, all spring into summer into autumn, with hedge clippers, keeps its round surface flat and even. I watch these birds and think about what they symbolize for me: joy and simplicity. To me, they represent resilience, adaptability, community, freedom, but, mostly, hope. With them in it, this world can’t be all that bad.

Almost every day, for awhile, they all disappear. Then I know that the hawk, that top predator, my nemesis has just dived at a breakneck speed into their backyard sanctuary. It took me some time to figure out where they go, my sparrows, so quickly. Then, one day, from my office chair, I could see them all hiding inside the hedge below my window. I could see all those little bodies protected by the tight weave of the thicket above them. The hawk looking down, could not see them.

It took awhile for the hawk to find them. I’d watch him land on the shrub. I’d rush to the

window and pound my hand on it. Off he would soar from behind my house and perch on the gable of the tallest house in my field of vision. I pound on the window; William checks for a nonexistent visitor at the front door.

Then that horrible day came when the hawk realized where they were. I watched as he plopped down on the ground and then poked his entire body into the hedge. My babies scattered as I pounded away on the window as hard as I could until William, not fooled this time, came into my office to ask what was going on.

A hawk. A ruthless person. A war advocate. Someone who preys on others, like a con artist. A world where language could be precise. Should be precise. *Russia invaded Ukraine.*