

Little Chained Bird

As nature's maid, the wind dusts the forest of yellowing leaves and sweeps the reddening specks on the floor to the side. She freshens the breeze with the smell of mowed lawn and hanging laundry. She maintains the lovely vibrancy of summer even in this early autumn air, the nuanced scents suggesting the beginning of the end of another year, giving a hint of nostalgia to the grandma at the boy's side.

He stands at the end of the sloped driveway, toes on the jagged asphalt between driveway and street. His hand tightly grips his grandma's as they wait. A girl of his height stands on the other side of the grandma, and she wears the smile of returning excitement. And a stare, down the road. Had her eyes been lasers, they would have burned a hole through the cracking gravel. But a frown rests on the face of the boy, a frown with eyebrows at slants and mouth upside-down in deliberate imitation of familial figures; but the youth in his unfaded dimples betrays his innocence.

Because inside his head, he is not angry at school. He is not pouting because he *dislikes* the idea of going away. No, at this moment the lights of the approaching school bus flash just like the lights of the warning siren blaring in his brain. The butterflies in his tummy rumble about like the roar of the bus. The ever-closeness of family and household will be shattered like the broken chains under the bus. Dazzling colors threaten to confuse, anger, frighten the boy. So he just stands there. Petrified.

But movement catches his eye. It is a bluejay, lightly perched and on a swaying branch. The boy watches, head inclined ever so slightly. It stares back, and only then is he cognizant of his own appearance. He wears a plaid shirt extending far past his waist, and his tiny sneakers strobe the "Lion King." His legs don cargo pants, and his back a Jansport backpack with a Sharpie scribble resembling a name. It is a relieving distraction. His feathery eyebrows loosen and the angle of his mouth lessens as the bird takes off to elude the lumbering vehicle. Flight. Free. Unpetrified, unlike the boy standing there.

If only I could be so free, he thinks. What if I could fly away whenever I wanted to; escape this life of being told what to do and where to go?

But no. He is no bird. He stands there, a schoolboy, the frown largely unchanged. The drag of the bus whips his hair around, only to be smoothed down by the practiced hand of grandma. Diesel fumes taint the air with its oily color and black scent. The engine reverberates, indecisive as the boy's heart.

The door opens. Tiny eyes peer out from deep inside. They pull him in, intrigue him.

The boy steps forward into a new world.