

APRON APOCALYPSE

Lyric Essays



JEANETTE LYNN

PREVIEW

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Press

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BAT REIGN

IT CAN BE A BIRD. It can be an animal. It can fold itself like a paperclip. Then suddenly, at supersonic speed, blast wide open and fly, in wild, careening swoops, around the bedroom, living room or kitchen—a hairy, membraned rocket. It can be a noun: bird, animal, rounded stick used to strike a ball in a game played on a diamond. It can be a verb: to bat, smack, strike, swat, thump, thwack.

It's the quick-change artist from hell. It's your new roommate, and you hate it. Pays no rent. Splatters its guano around and never cleans up after itself. It sees with its ears. It makes no sense. And when caught it sends out a signal—staccato of high-frequency chirps—that summons a replacement. Each new roommate brandishes a wider wingspan than the last.



It never announces itself with a calling card—it just blows in at dusk or later, sometimes the middle of the night. Its schedule the opposite of yours.

Once it is in it is in. Did it even *want* in? You cannot tell. You cannot tell what, on God's hoar-frosted earth, it wants. You need it to stay far from your hair. You need it gone. It's an

after-hours deal. At night you call the building manager who, thankfully, answers his cell even though the office is closed, and while you wait, panicked, behind your closed bedroom door, he catches it in a box—you hear its panicked squeaks inside the box and you suppose for a second you should pity it, for no creature wishes capture, but you don't. You're glad it's trapped. It won't be killed in any case, but sent, boxed, across the river to the university, Toxicology, tested for rabies. Then released. The old night manager, a handsome man with a Scottish accent, arrived after-hours to capture it; he brought his son, a freckled boy of about ten, who, seeing the chittering little thing with its single claw jutting from its wing, declared it "cool." But the kid didn't to have to live with it. Would he like one hanging out, a little bag of night, above his Harry Potter poster? You doubt it. The new night manager, all macho swagger, scoffed at your terror as he snagged it, bagged it. He laughed at the whole thing, saying where he once lived in France, bats were everywhere, mouse-eared, and much larger, often in his flat and no big deal. His bat-woman jokes weren't funny, either. But you lacked swagger, and nothing could cure your phobia of it, either in its noun or verb form. No grammar could contain it. When you live alone that's just how you want to live—alone.



Everyone has a bat story. You learned this during those three years of invasion. You became the ancient mariner—compelled to grind out your woeful tale to whoever would listen. And the echoes returned to you—more bat yarns. These did not make you feel better. Your story was special, worse. This was no game played on a diamond. You'd worked hard to

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build a home, and it was torn down, wing by wing. In retrospect, you find it sad that you told bat stories as a form of social survival. But you had to concede there was something to bats; they proved the only topic that never seemed to bore people or send their eyes hand-ward to check their phones. Those little animal/bird hybrid bastards commanded attention.

You've been flitting between tenses. Past. Present. Now again. Then then. Now then, that's how tense the bat reign. The bat years unmoored you, corroded your quality of life, your very mental health. When you live alone, a hermetically sealed space is essential; porosity is the enemy. Nothing should get in.

People said you should do something about your bat problem. You told the building supervisor—a snarky brat who supervised the after-hours guy-managers who caught the bats—she had to do something; she sent a young, hooded hipster to your apartment—Newman, the bat guy. He bounced around a little beepy light and said, “They’re not here, I’m not feeling it.” But of course, they returned. Writing this, too, makes them return—as fretting, trebled soundwaves. And even now, whenever some rapid, flicking shape catches your peripheral vision, you gasp, swerve in avoidance. A reaction internalized from living in a bat cave for three years—the same period as your torturous divorce proceedings.

Bats. Divorce. This connection wasn't lost on you—nasty little echoes of grief, dark invaders, dusky, sharp-toothed arrows, messengers stabbing the new life you attempted to build. *You have mail*. Bloody great. Always the same news: You failed. You failed as a wife. A life-builder. In your developing genre of post-wife solitude, you hung art and arranged

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furniture and designed a cozy healing space with a split-leaf philodendron—but the shadow world was having none of it. Our best-laid plans are bat-shit.

One day you were blending a smoothie, and it swooped close above your head, out of nowhere. You screamed—as usual. It shot over into your apartment's farthest corner, near the electronic drum kit you never played, near the stacked Rubbermaid containers stuffed with your old married life, piles of papers you'd never sort. That junk corner provided a haven of hiding places for the invader. Suddenly you wondered if it might be possible to actually live with the thing—a sort of indoor Walden, an eco-experiment about which you might journal, a harmony-in-nature concept. But that was ludicrous because you hate nature, except lilacs. You quickly dismissed the concept, then googled your province's Residential Tenancies Act to see if you had any rights.

There were epochs when life was bat-less and ordinary, calm, invader-free periods that seduced you into thinking perhaps the reign of bats had ended and none would return, ever again. In a similar vein, silent swaths of time passed with no word from your divorce lawyer, a vampire bat on the east coast. But eventually she swooped back into your life, a massive invoice tucked under her sinister wing. And another bat wiggled through some imperceptible crack to disturb your sleep.

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