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Bird of Dawn, Bird of Dusk

(first four chapters of a novel)

I love to have your feedback on this. Specifically I'd like to know: is there's any parts that are confusing? Do characters seem uneque and interesting? Do characters behave as you'd expect them to behave? Feel free to PM, notecard or e-mail me:

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Thanks!

Part 1 – Bird of Dusk

Chapter 1 – Strange Happening

Samuel glanced at the small cloth sack that sat next to him on the fire escape outside his third story apartment room. That small sack contained all his worldly goods; fifteen cents and a little bit of food. He looked back up at the skyline and wondered what it would be like, outside the city. He had planned out what he was going to do, but he admitted to himself he was scared. He also convinced himself that it was perfectly reasonable; after all it must be what all adventurers felt just before leaving to the unknown. Of course, he knew it was a little different because he wasn't going to any place that wasn't explored yet. There wasn't any place like that left in America. Samuel wasn't sure if there was something he didn't know to plan for and that things would be much different than he imagined, traveling alone. He shook his head to dismiss this thought. No, he had determined to make the leap, this time he would go. There were opportunities out there, instead of staying and being a strain on his parents. He didn't want to, but he had to go. He had waited long enough since that terrible day, three years ago to the day. Twelve was old enough to find his own way, but not quit yet. In the meantime, Samuel sat cross-legged behind the metal bars and with a pencil and scrap of paper sketched the skyline of stone buildings and sun that slowly receded behind them, casting long shadows like fingers reaching out towards him.

Samuel could smell smoke from the chimneys, mixed with the crisp, earthy smell that announced the beginning of autumn. The sound of some classical song sounded out loudly from a window nearby. Below the traffic of people walking and cars going by made a mummer of sound, hurrying in all directions. The urban white noise that city dwellers fall asleep to.

Some pigeons and a few seagulls roosted on nearby unoccupied balconies, or on the corner street signs or the ground, trying to salvage scraps of food dropped and darting away from the people and vehicles. One that was different from the others, a pure white bird that was in fact not pigeon but a dove perched on the street sign on the corner. The ugly grey pigeons that already perched there moved away. The white bird looked down from its perch and it almost looked to Samuel that the bird actually was reading the street sign! The white bird then flew to one of the balconies on the corner at the highest apartment on the building, looking down each way down the street, then the bird suddenly looked up, watching the sun as it slowly disappeared behind the building tops.

The dove suddenly raised its pure white wings and flew in a flutter of feathers, shooting right past Samuel through the open window to his bedroom, and Samuel saw the dove fly in to his open closet and disappear. Strange Samuel thought. He had never seen a bird do anything like that. Though they were used to people, the birds in the city generally did their best to keep at least a fair distance. Samuel sighed. _Well, I guess I better chase it back out._ Samuel went back inside and looked for the dove.

Samuel walked closer to the closet, but he stopped in surprise when a slender white arm reached out from behind the door. "Stop! Please." A soft, trembling girl's voice said from the closet "I haven't anything on." Samuel stopped, more from surprise than from the girl's pleas.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?"

"Please, something to wear."

"Oh. Take what you need from the closet." And then he added "I'm turning around."

Samuel turned away from the closet door, shutting his eyes. After a few moments he heard the girl speak again.

"Alright."

Samuel turned around, and saw the complete girl for the first time. The girl looked around his age, no more than a year or so younger. She was about half a head shorter than him and wore a pair of grey corduroy short pants and a shirt, selected from his closet. They were too large for her, only the ends of four of her fingers on each hand peeked out from the sleeves of the shirt, and the pants cuffs were a good deal higher than they would have been on Samuel. The girl was pretty, but not that Samuel was old enough to particularly notice one way or the other. Her auburn hair hung down to her shoulders, but was unkempt, going off in every direction. She stared at Samuel with her blue eyes with a look of fear like a mouse would look at a cat.

She stood with her legs turned to one side towards the door and arms spread apart, her muscles tense, looking as though she might sprint at any moment out the door.

“What happened to that bird?” Samuel asked, turning his head and looking through the corner of his eye to the closet door. The girl seemed to make a short move to go, but then stopped. She turned to Samuel and her eyes narrowed. “You don’t get it?” She said

It was a last grasp at what he thought the world was supposed to be, until now. But here he saw a bird disappear and a girl appear. The door was shut and she wasn’t there just minutes before, so how else could have she gotten in there?

“What’s your name?” Samuel asked.

“Mary”

“I’m Samuel.” There was an awkward pause, Mary still looking ready to leave, though at the same time something keeping her in place. Samuel wanted to help this girl, but wasn’t sure what to do. If he told his parents there wasn’t any way they’d believe him, they’d just say that the door was left unlocked again, she had snuck up while he was day dreaming. “Where do you live?” Samuel asked.

Mary took a step towards the door. “I’m fine. I’ll find my own way.”

Samuel considered just letting her go; she didn’t seem to want his help, but she was lost, and he didn’t think anyone should have to wander in the dark alone.

“But you’re lost, aren’t you?”

Mary turned back towards Samuel.

“I saw the bird- I mean you reading the signs.”

Mary hesitated, and turned again towards Samuel. “I live at First Hill.”

“I’ve heard of it,” Samuel said. “But I’ve never been there.” Then he added “But I could help you find it.”

Mary cocked her head to the side for a moment, looking like she was considering the offer, and then looking at Samuel again gave a firm nod of her head.

Samuel wrote out a note on a tattered edged piece of paper that read: "I went out for a little bit. I will be back soon. -Samuel." then left it in on the kitchen table where he knew one of his parents would find it. They headed to the door, but then Samuel suddenly stopped. "Oh wait." He said and went out the window and grabbed the bag he had left out on the fire escape and set it in his closet and then left with Mary into the night.

Chapter 2 - Light and Darkness

Samuel led the way down the steps to the door that lead to the street and after some brief discussion, Mary reckoned she came from the east. Samuel extended his hand to her, but she didn't immediately take it. "You promise to stay with me, until I get home?" Mary asked. Wasn't it what he had already said he was going to do? "Of course." He blurted out, and trying to hide the hurt. Mary nodded and slipped her hand in to his.

By this time it was dark though there were still some people and carts, there was much less than before. The street lamps had already been turned on, affording a little bit of light for the two travelers to see by.

They walked along mostly silently, sometimes with Mary gesturing down a side road and saying something about it looking familiar. But the further they went, it seemed longer between these landmarks, and Mary seemed less sure each time that they were going the right way. Mary at first said "this is the right way." But then it became instead "I think this is right." or "Hmm. This way, I think." At the same time, everything was becoming steadily less and less familiar to Samuel. This is what it will be like, when I leave home. Samuel thought. It was definitely exciting, and frightening. This was his starting out in an adventure, thought it wasn't exactly as he planned.

Samuel didn't want to admit it, but he didn't know where he was as it was getting late. "Does anything look familiar to you?" Samuel asked. He could just barely see her shake her head, then after a moment Mary realized he might not have seen her gesture and said "No".

"Maybe we should ask someone?" Samuel said.

"No. I'd rather not." Mary replied quickly.

“But why?”

“Please we can find it. I don’t like strangers.”

Samuel shrugged and they continued on. At places they turned when directed by Mary at times when she recognized an area, but then soon realized that the area was not as familiar as she apparently thought. The fear of being really lost hit Samuel and uncertainty that he would be able to find his way home. It felt as the city was taunting them. Samuel suspected that even a place familiar to him would look this grim in the dark.

Samuel glanced over to Mary and stopped. “One minute.” Samuel went up to a man dressed in suit and hat with a walking cane with a brass knob at the top. With him was a lady in a fine dress and long brimmed hat at his arm. “Excuse me sir, Could you tell me where First hill is?”

The man looked at the boy with surprise “Why would you want to go there?”

“My friend, she lives there, sir.”

“Oh.” The man said sharply but softly, as if embarrassed. “She?” the man said, looking more than a little confused. “Oh.” He said again, just as he had before when he noticed Mary. “I do know where it is. Down that way about five blocks and then turn right and go two more.” The man said, pointing down opposite way they had just come down after a turn. “Thank you sir.” The man turned again and walked on, but before they left from view into the darkness he heard the woman say “Those poor children.”

“I told you not to do that.” Mary said after the man and woman were out of sight.

“Why not? We needed help.”

“I told you I don’t like strangers.” And then after a few moments of silence. “Let’s just keep going.” Samuel shook his head. He wanted to point out that they now knew where they were going, but decided that wouldn’t help and keep silent.

Eventually as they walked, things became more familiar to Mary. “I know I’ve been here before.” Mary said. The rows of street lamps ended here, leaving a dark black wall. There were no more people here. The air here too was less pleasant, smelling of garbage.

“Are you sure?” Samuel asked.

“Yes, I remember that café.” She said, pointing to the sign of a small corner café on the corner. It was an indication at least they were at least headed in the right

direction and close, a small assurance and relief. So, now Mary led the way and Samuel followed as the two now only nearly lost children continued on. The further they went on the worse repair the buildings seemed to be in and the more Mary recognized. They passed two men, one middle-aged and another who was older that were huddled in the doorway of a shop, their few belongings laid out around them, huddled in blankets, readying for their night's sleep. Samuel glanced to them, but kept moving. He wished he could help, but had no idea how, and besides was already helping the girl.

Finally they came to the corner and without hesitating Mary turned right and began to climb a steep hill. When they came to the top, and a few more turns Mary came to stop in front of one of the buildings. On the street sat small houses, looking to be in poor repair

This was First hill. The court was a small cul-de-sac off the main street. The cluster of buildings in the court were four stories tall and made of grey brick. Grey brick in the darkness giving the look of twice the gloominess. The outside of the buildings in the court were in very bad repair, and Samuel realized the reason for man and the women's comments. The shutters in the windows were missing or hung loose on a single hinge, looking like they would fall at any minute. Many of the windows were broken, some by naughty children, or by accident by loose baseballs from children playing in the street. Either way it was done, a new pane could not be afforded and so the only option was to cover it up instead as best as they could. At the entrance a sign announced that they were in the right place, but with a gloominess that seemed to be more of a way of telling wayward travelers to avoid it. Someone had carved the crude form of a frowning face into the sign, either a resident's child announcing unhappiness or an outsider cruelly mocking the resident's misery.

Samuel had thought that he and his parents as poor, living in the small cramped apartment and his parents were far from considering themselves rich. But at the same time they were fortunate enough to afford an apartment that was clean. Samuel realized that he had been taking for granted what little he had, not even thinking that some have much less.

Mary went through the door of the building and up the stairs and Samuel followed close behind. The staircase creaked as if crying out in pain. The wooden railing was missing many of the pillars, and others that were there were badly cracked. Mary stopped at a door and knocked. Only silence answered from the other side. Mary knocked again, louder. "Mama! I'm home. I got lost but I'm alright." But there still

was no answer. Mary turned to Samuel. “She must have gone looking for me. I must have really worried her.”

“What can we do?”

“Turn around please.” Mary said.

“Why?”

“Please.”

Once again Samuel turned away.

Samuel didn't hear any noise loud enough to tell what she was doing, but after less than a minute he heard Mary say “Alright” and Samuel turned back around. Mary unlocked the door put the key in her pocket, opened the door, and then stopped, standing with the door half open, as if frozen. “What's the matter?” Samuel asked, and then looked over her shoulder. The apartment was a single room with a small kitchen nook on the one side. The furniture of the room consisted of a table, two chairs and two mattresses laid in opposite corners of the further end of the room. The walls and floor had patches of grimey dark grey on the faded white walls. The furniture of the small room was strewn about, a chair knocked over and a table at an angle that indicated it was knocked aside. Mary turned back to Samuel. “I think something bad has happened.”

Part 2 – Bird of Dawn

Chapter 3 – Lovette

Lovette opened her eyes and looked around. She was in her own bed in her own bedroom. She laughed at herself. “Why do I need to assure myself? of course it was a dream.” She thought. Lovette had been having the same dream almost every night now for just about a year. It was strange, but not particularly terrible. She dreamt that she was a bird in a cage. The cage was on her father's work desk and in her dream she would watch her father work. Lovette had seen her father working only a few times, since he never liked having anyone else around while he worked. But she had seen him at his desk, mixing chemicals or scribbling furiously at his desk. She had no idea what he did. When she had asked one time, he had told her simply that it was “boring grownup work”. This of course annoyed her; she was sixteen, not a child. This was the only time Lovette could ever remember feeling like her father was talking down to her. Not that she wanted to spend more time in her father's work room than she had too, most of the chemicals he kept there didn't smell very good. Lovette realized that the smell was also something she distinctly remembered in her dreams.

Lovette got up, washed her face and dressed. He did a sort of high-heeled danced to the various parts of the room, to the washstand, then to the closet, arms out like a ballerina, choosing a long pink dress that was one of her favorites. Today she was going to meet Thomas again.

Her father didn't know about Thomas at all, or that she had been meeting a young man regularly. Though she wasn't doing anything specifically that her father wouldn't exactly approve of- she prided herself on her self discipline and besides she believed what she had been taught about waiting being best and the tragic consequences of impatience and imprudence. All they did was meet in a public place like the park and talk all afternoon, though lately over the last few days something had been bothering him, though he changed the subject when she asked about it.

Part of the reason she hid these meetings was she suspected her father wouldn't like him. The other reason was it was a sort of secret rebellion that while was small enough to not harm the everyday harmony, she felt she was getting away with something and it was refreshing and exhilarating to her.

Her father didn't allow her to go to school, but instead hired a private tutor by the name of Miss Gresham who came to the house every day to teach her. She was like the tutors in stories, an elderly woman with grey hair, long nose and spectacles. She smelled like mothballs and perfume and had very little sense of humor. She had been her fifth teacher in the last two years, and not very different from the four before her. None of them appreciated the jokes she played on her teachers. They were just harmless jokes, the tacks on the chair, or the ex-lax in her coffee. Her father would talk with her, sternly but never raising his voice, and some times pleadingly each time a teacher said they would not return. He also told her she wasn't too old to spank, though he never went through with that threat. Overall these stern talks were hardly unpleasant enough to prevent her from planning the next prank for whatever new tutor she might have.

I'll be good today Lovette thought. _Today I'm seeing my Thomas_. Lovette got through her lessons for that day and when the tutor had left she called out to her father who was in his study "I'm going out for a little bit."

"Be back by dinnertime, dear." Her father called back, muffled through the door. and she went.

Thomas was at the bench in the park, early as he always was, waiting for her reading a book. Lovette didn't know how early he comes and waits for her.

They talked as they always did, though Thomas seemed distracted.

"Lovette, do you love me?" Thomas asked, suddenly. He looked at her with a determined, dead serious and searching expression, as if looking for clues for what she felt on the details of her face.

Lovette was surprised by this. Thomas had said he loved her a few times, and his intentions to marry her when he had the means. Lovette wasn't sure how she felt about the boy. She liked him, though she wasn't sure love was the word for how she felt. He was a pleasant diversion, though she would never admit it to him. Instead she asked "What?"

He held his face closer to hers. "Do. You. Love. me?" He accentuated each word separately.

"You know I do, Thomas." She lied.

"Is your father home?"

Lovette laughed, turning her head and looking at him through the corner of her eyes in what she thought was a coy and seductive pose. "I don't understand how your mind works."

"Is he home?" he repeated.

Lovette sighed, and put her hands on her lap. "He's always home, shut in his office working."

"Go home and get some things." Thomas said, putting his hand on her shoulder. Lovette had to admit despite her feeling or lack of feeling there was a little thrill in it.

"We'll run away together and go far from here, and see the world."

"I can't do that Thomas."

"Why not? You said you love me."

"But I can't go; it'd break my father's heart."

"Don't I mean more to you than your father? Besides, you have to go sometime."

"Says who?"

"Tsh. Do you plan on moving in with your father when we marry?"

"Why not? There's room, it's a big house."

"Does he even know about me?" and Thomas turned away, which Lovette thought was strange. He seemed to be hiding something, but what?

"Well, I haven't told him yet, but when I find the right way to say it, I will."

Thomas stood and turned to her. "Either you go with me, or we are through."

"I can't just go at a whim tonight." She said. "Give me a day to prepare and say good bye to people." She hoped that maybe a day was enough for him to forget it, or for her to come up with way to dissuade him.

Thomas shook his head. "It has to be tonight."

"Why tonight?" Lovette asked.

Thomas shook his head. "I can't say why, please let's just go. We can be happy. I'm afraid I won't be able to face you again after tonight, though I hope you understand"

"No" Lovette said. "I'm sorry, but I must stay."

Thomas turned suddenly away, but then turned back to Lovette. "I'm sorry. I can't face you after tonight. But I want you to know, what I'm doing is for you. I must go." Then he leaned forward and kissed her, second long kiss that was ten times the thrill of the touch on her shoulder, then he turned and ran off.

Lovette wondered what he was planning on doing. Her curiosity, and perhaps too the sensation of the kiss which made her question her lack of feelings for him fueled her vow to follow him and find out.

Chapter 4 - Meeting

Mary went to put the chairs upright, and adjust the small wooden table that had been nudged to a angle when she saw the envelope on one edge of the table.

Mary picked it up, opened it and read the letter inside. Samuel just stood there, watching her read. He saw eyes after going to the bottom returning to the top to read it again. When Samuel could no longer take the suspense he asked "What does it say?" Mary didn't say anything, but held the letter out for Samuel to take and he read it himself. The note was typed out neatly. It read:

"I have your mother. You will come to under the George Washington bridge. I have someone watching you come alone, and do not involve the police or your mother dies. "

"What should we do?"

Mary shook her head. "I don't know. I'm really scared." Mary sat down on the floor, perhaps a little quicker than she had intended and landed with a dull thud on the hard floor. She held her hands over her eyes, her head down and Samuel could hear her sniffing.

Samuel asked "What do you think he wants?"

"I think- he wants me." She said. It sounded to Samuel that she was trying to hold some control of her voice, to hide her tears she was forcing back.

"But why-"

"Thank you for your help, but please go." Mary cut in.

Samuel paused a moment, then slowly turned to the door, taking a single step, but then stopped.

If he left, what would this girl do? She was scared, and didn't want to show it. _She had a good reason to be scared_ Samuel thought, though he knew better than to say it. This was something that no one should have to do alone. Perhaps the two of them could figure something out, together.

Samuel turned to the girl again, she was looking up at him, and when he turned around she quickly turned her face away and to the floor.

"If you need time alone, I'll wait outside, and then I'll help you find your mom. No one should have to do this alone." She looked up. "Thank you." She said. Samuel went out the door and shut it behind him, and he heard the girl's crying.

...

The next evening Samuel, carrying a sack walked from his house back to near where Mary lived. There was a light drizzle. He didn't have a rain coat or umbrella, and so his clothes were getting slowly soaked through. They had made plans last night, or the best plans they could before Samuel went back home.

Just before he would have passed a corner café, he turned into an alleyway behind it and dropped the sack in the recess of a doorway. He turned around and walked a few paces and stopped. A white dove flew down in to the alley way, into the doorway and a few minutes later out emerged Mary, who was dressed as a boy in slacks and cap concealing her long hair. Together they left the alley and proceeded up towards the rendezvous on the note.

Samuel asked "What is it like?" Mary looked at him, confused, apparently not knowing what he was asking. "To fly I mean." Samuel said.

"It's- wonderful." She said. "I guess I never get used to it."

Samuel tried to imagine what it would be like. He had never even been in an airplane, and even that would be far different than soaring as a bird, with nothing between you and the sky. There would be so much he could see up there.

They walked for about two hours northwest of Mary's house. Samuel had managed to find a map that day, so finding their way was much easier this time. Finally they made it to the south end of the bridge. Samuel had heard stories that trolls lived under the bridge that grab children and eat them, though he didn't think trolls existed, though he hadn't thought girls could transform into birds until yesterday either.

Samuel took Mary's hand in his, and Mary didn't pull her hand away this time. "It's ok, I'm here." He said, trying to sound brave to disguise the real reason he was taking her hand, which was to reassure himself. Hand in hand they crossed the bridge together. By now the evening drizzle had died down, though the overcast skies threatened to perhaps drizzle or worse again maybe that same night.

They went up a few more blocks and then took a steep staircase that ran along side the bridge down to the lower street that run under it. The street below was a intersection in the shape of a T, running south, east and west. They found a pile of boxes to hide behind near a lamp post within a hundred feet of where they had been told to meet and waited.

After about an hour of waiting, a man came down the street, passing by them. He stopped under the bridge, pulled out a cigarette and lit it, the dim light illuminating

his face. The man was clean shaven, and had a squarish, rough looking face. His trousers and button-up shirt were ragged. On his head he wore a flat cap like Samuel's. The man looked down the street both ways. It looked like he was expecting someone.

Samuel felt Mary's hand tap on his shoulder, and Samuel turned to her. She didn't say anything, but gave a quizzical look, silently asking "what are we going to do?" Samuel hadn't the slightest idea. Samuel shook his head. "I don't know" he whispered. "Maybe we should follow him to see where they're keeping your mom, though I don't know how long he'll wait for us."

Just then there was a glittering noise over their shoulder. Down the street away from the bridge Samuel could see the source of the noise was a few trashcans spilling over, clanking against each other and sending the lids rolling. Samuel saw a young woman in a long pink dress back up into the light of a street lamp. "Lovette" a voice called out. Samuel turned back around to the bridge. It was the man they had been watching who had spoken. The young woman ran off and the man began to chase her. As the man passed them, Samuel leaned forward to see where the man was going, but slipped and lost his balance, also nudging a box and spilling an old open can that was sitting on top of it. The man turned to the noise, and Samuel froze. The man gave a started noise when he saw the two children. Samuel realized he was looking right at Mary, who was still behind him. He quickly took something like a card or paper from the breast pocket of his shirt and looked at it for a few moments, and then hard at Mary again. "It's you!" he said, and started towards her, trying to leap over Samuel, but Samuel leapt up in his way, grabbing him while the man tried to fling him aside.

"Run!" Samuel called over his shoulder. Samuel caught movement out of the corner of his eye and just as he turned back to the big man, Samuel felt a push from both hands by the man and was hurled backwards onto his back on the ground, and the man leaped over his prone body. Samuel was stunned for a second from the surprise of being knocked backwards, but when he saw the legs sail over he made a grab and managed to catch one and the man fell with a crash. The man kicked wildly and managed to connect with his foot against his head and Samuel loosed his grip. Another hard hit and Samuel let go completely. Samuel felt the floor spinning. He saw the man get up and run off to where presumably Mary had run off to, and then Samuel shut his eyes and everything went dark.

Samuel came to. He didn't know how much later it was. Everything was hazy and felt like he was moving. His eyes felt heavy, and he shut his eyes again and slept.

