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Bird-watch

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Bird-watch

Mike Vanden Bosch

Each spring red-breasted robins dared winter and when sleet pelted, we wished them a red-warm wind and sunshine. No boy's hands reached for stones.

In summers red-headed woodpeckers wore white and black for wrecking. Every morning their beaks like baby air-hammers hammered dead tree trunks. Our necks ached, watching. Our slingshots hung limp while we bowed to the rat-a-tat-tatting echo through our grove.

In the fall, white and blue pigeons cooed the haymow cozy but fouled the alfalfa until cows mooded its taste and we moved birds—enemies: at midnight we raided their roof-high roosts, blinding them into our nets with flashlights, and sold them ruthlessly to their deaths.

Then in winter, nearly birdless but for house sparrows swarming our trees, we slung stones at God's gifts with David's weapon. When feathers fell we thought we heard God: "One, ten, fifty feathers." Next spring when red-breasted robins dared April's sleet and woodpeckers drummed dead trees, we were back on God's side.