

Bird with One Wing

You might think that a bird with just one wing would be a bird that could not fly, but this is not the truth. The truth is, this bird with just one wing, it flew. It flew through the blue of the sky. It flew in a loop till the clouds and the stars in the sky told it to take a break. This bird with its beak, it sang to the clouds and the stars as if to say what else is a bird like me to do. Rest, the stars told it. Watch us shine. Sing when the sun comes up with the light of day. But the bird knew that what a bird did best was fly. So it flew. It grew old. Three years passed. When it died, where its one wing should have been, a new wing had grown back.

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Or in a twist on this tale of the bird with just one wing, when it died, where its one wing should have been, there was an eye that had grown in where a wing should have been. This was the bird's third eye, and it was through this eye that the bird watched the boys in the woods as they walked through the woods in search of the bird whose wing they found in the place in the woods where the witch had dropped when they took a rock to the side of her head.

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No, it was not an eye that grew in in the place where the wing should have been, it was a mouth, a mouth with a tongue down in it, and teeth, a beaked mouth, and this bird, it sang—yes, sounds flew out of it—like a bird with two mouths.

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It was the girl with no tongue in her mouth who saw the bird with just one wing turn in to be the witch. It was night, and the girl with no tongue walked out in the night to spend some time in the dark. She looked up at the sky filled with stars, and then closed her eyes and saw them in a new way with her eyes closed in this way. The stars, when

her eyes were closed, moved in ways that they did not move when she did not close her eyes to look up at the night's sky. Now, with her eyes closed no more, she looked down and not up and saw, not in the sky but on the dirt of the ground, a bird with just one wing. It, this bird, it looked up at the girl with no tongue in her mouth with its one wing stuck out to hide its face. The girl bumped her lips and blew out breath in the form of a B as in bird, as if to say bird, but no word, no bird, flew up out of the puff of wind made by her girl mouth. Then the bird stood up on its two stick legs and just like that, like the way the sky with her eyes closed moved in new ways, the bird rose up and took the form of a witch. Not just a witch, but *the* witch, for the girl with no tongue, as you've been told, once lived in the house in the woods where the witch lived. I thought you were dead, the girl with no tongue in her mouth said in her own girl head. The witch had lived with the girl so she knew when the girl had words in her head that she wished she could say. That's right, the witch said. You thought I was dead, but it takes more than a rock to the side of my head to make a witch like me be dead. She threw back her head and laughed. Her nose grew long and twitched when she laughed like the twig of a tree in the wind. Her hair turned more black than it was when she was the witch that she was in the first place. On her head, a hat, black, brimmed, shaped like the roof of a house, rose up on the top of her witch head. She took hold of the hand of the girl with no tongue in her mouth and led her back through the woods, to take her back to the house in the woods where this girl once lived with the witch (and she could not speak to call out for help), but the girl with no tongue turned back and ran, she ran back to the house with the boy and the girl that they took care of in it, and the witch stood in the dark of the woods and clapped her hands twice and took flight, like a bird, to blend in with the leaves of the trees and the dark of the night that filled in the holes in the trees with its black.

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One night, as if all at once in the dark of the night, all the leaves on all the trees—more leaves than there are stars in the sky—all the leaves all fell at once, that night, from the arms of the trees. And now that there were no more leaves for the limbs and arms of the trees to hold on tight to, the wind in the trees that blew through the trees seemed to pick up steam. The wind, that is to say, blew so hard, that night, that some trees were blown down. Now you could see through the trees and in through the trees to where the birds liked to sit in the trees and in their nests.

Soon there were more birds in the trees than there were leaves on the dirt of the ground or stars up in the black of the sky. Up in those trees, the boys knew it in their heads, there was some bird up in those trees with just one wing and they hoped that it would sing a kind of song that just a bird with one wing could sing so that these two boys would look up to find it.

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Once in a while a plane would fly way up high in the blue of the sky, though no one down here, in the woods—not the boys or the girls or the witch or the birds—thought much of those who might be in it.

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There was a road, too, that led up to the edge of the woods but the boys did not think too much of it, this road, or think to see where it might lead to. They had heard that there was a town that the road led to, though a town was not a place that the boys cared to go to or would want to be.

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Town was half a day's walk through the woods past the house where the witch lived to get to where town was. Town had less trees and birds and more homes with lights on in them that made the stars at night shine less bright. One day the boy who was not the boy who climbed up a tree and stayed there to be like a bird up in a tree went to town to see what he might find there: a bird with one wing, he did not think so, but who knows where a bird with one wing might end up. He'd been to town twice as a child, once with his mom to get two pairs of new shoes and once with the man who was his dad to buy for this dad a kind of a tool that he could use to help him cut curves in the wood that he sawed and nailed and glued to make chairs to sit in and stools to step on and the toys made out of wood that he used to give to his two sons as gifts back when they were two young boys who liked to play with toys made out of wood and not just spend all their time in the woods with the birds and the trees. In town, the boy walked through town but he did not see much that he'd want to bring back with him to the house in the woods where he lived with the girl and the girl with no tongue. He saw men who were not his dad and not men that were not his mom and the boys

that he saw in town looked at him as if he were a boy with two heads and four eyes. It's true he did not have shoes on his feet and his pants did not reach down past his knees but he was just a boy like them who would one day grow up to be a man. He did see one thing that he did like and so when it looked like no one would see him, he took what he liked—it was a bike that was blue—and he hopped up on it and he rode it—yes, it's true, he took it, or stole it—and he rode it on out of town and back to where the woods were and he made it back through the woods and back to his house in the woods in half the time it would have taken had he walked. He rode through those woods on that bike's two wheels and felt, at times, like a bird in the sky in flight from one part of the sky to the side of the sky where the sun had just set and the moon, that night, it too would come to set there too. He flew and as he passed by the house in the woods where the witch lived with no one in the dark to talk to or sleep next to he twice squeezed on the horn of this bike so that the honk that it made might wake the witch up from her sleep if she was not dead as she should have been or if the ghost that she came to be walked through the house that she lived in back when she was a witch that was not dead (hit on the head by a rock thrown by a boy and then struck three times more by the same rock to make sure that she was dead).

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The girl with no tongue in her mouth had lived in the town in a house in this town with a mom and a dad of her own. She was not born with a tongue in her mouth. She was a girl of twelve with a voice that could sing the birds to wake in the trees up till the day she left from town to walk through the woods to go see the witch who lived in the woods, she'd heard, since this witch, she'd been told, by a voice in the trees, or by a voice in a dream—she could not tell which was which—she'd been told that this witch could make a young girl's wish come true if she wished it to the witch to come true. The girl, too young to know the truth of the witch, went to see the witch to wish to be loved by a boy who lived in town in a house that was so big and white and made out of brick and not wood: this house was so big you'd think that this boy was a prince who lived here in it. The girl, the fool that she was to think such a thing of the witch, was in love, she thought, with this boy who she'd seen just once, so she went to see the witch to make her wish to be loved back by this boy you'd think, by the house that he lived in, that he was in truth not just a boy but a prince. In truth he was not a prince,

he was just a boy, but the girl who was in love did not see this. So the girl left the town and walked through the woods to the house where the witch lived in it with no one but her witch self in it and the birds in the trees for her to talk to. A bird in the tree told the witch that a girl was on her way to come see her, so when the girl knocked on the door of the house where the witch lived the witch was right there to greet her. What can I do for you, my sweets? the witch asked the girl, and the girl told the witch what she in her heart wished for. The witch thumbed the hairs on her chin. It will cost you, the witch said to the girl. I don't have much, the girl said back. I don't have much at all. My friends in town all say they wish they had my hair. It was true: the hair on this girl's head looked as if it had been spun from gold. The witch had hair that looked like the wool from a not young sheep that had spent its days down in the mud. Hair! the witch shrieked. What would I want with your hair? The witch here paused to pluck at her nose with her right thumb. Can you sing? was what the witch said then to the girl. Sing, the witch told her. And so the girl threw back her head and out from her girl mouth came a sound and a song that made the birds in the trees stop to see how and where such a sound and a song might be sung from. The witch fell back in her skin when she heard such a sound and when the girl shut her lips to end her song, the witch grinned, I think I can help you. Close your eyes, the witch said to the girl. And when the girl did what the witch told, the witch leaned in close to the girl, put her gray lips on the girl's, and kissed her like this till the witch got what she got and pulled back from this kiss. What the witch got when she pulled back from this kiss was the girl's tongue which hung like a thin pink fish from the clenched jaws of her steel teeth.

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Or it goes more like this: when the girl when she still had a tongue in her mouth who was in love with the boy who lived in town in a house that would make you think that a prince lived in such a house, when the girl left town to walk through the woods to get to the house where the witch lived, for her, this girl, to see if the witch could make her wish to be true—not the wish, this time, for the boy to love her back, but the wish for her to be rich—the witch did not, in this twist of the tale, kiss her and take out her tongue with her steel teeth—or were they, the teeth of the witch, made out of wood? No, this time in the tale, she sat the girl down in a chair and reached in with her witch hand and pulled out the girl's tongue as if it were a tooth with no root to hold it in its place.

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A bird, when it flies, it cuts the sky where it flies.

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At night the girl with no tongue cried tears that she caught in a cup that she kept and held up to her eyes till the cup with her tears in it got full. When the cup that she kept and held up to her eyes got full, she would hold this cup down to the girl in the house that she took care of and she would tell the girl to drink. The girl who drank the cup full of tears soon got sick of the taste and learned to spit out what was in the cup. What she spit out made a sound that a shell found in the sea would make if you dropped it to the ground.

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When a bird with just one wing can't fly what it does when it can't fly is sing but then when its song comes to an end then it is a bird that can't fly and won't sing which is the same as a bird that is dead. A bird that is dead can't fly and can't sing so dig a hole in the ground for it and put it down in it and put the dirt back in so that some cat or coon won't come and eat it. Once there was a cat that caught and killed a bird and ate the bird but the bird was not dead when the cat ate it and the bird flew back up and out through the mouth of the cat that ate it. One of that bird's wings got caught in the throat of that cat and it tore off when the bird flew up and out of that cat's mouth. That bird, with just one wing on it now, it flew round and round like a dog that might try to catch up with its own tail. When it fell to the ground with a warm thud, a bird with two wings swooped down and took this bird up in its own bird mouth and flew with it up to the top of some tree where it stayed and did not move but it sang out as if it had grown a new mouth where its one wing used to be.