

CAROLE GIANGRANDE

Goshawk

*with thanks to Helen Macdonald, poet and
falconer*

The hawk's wings peel the sky open, a bloodied dawn. Watching, the child sees the tattoo of sunlight on feathers grey with air. She is ecstatic: *You are my body, hold me.* Only the child is grown now and she feels the lure of flight, of bare trees like veins against the skin of a wintry, ice-flecked sky, the life in them the same as in her. This is why she watches the great hawk, the dark cloak of its wings, its breast a necklace of feathers strewn with light. *Come closer,* she says to the firebrand, *come,* and she imagines how it will be, the heat of the creature warming her gloved fist, the veil of time rent from top to bottom. How she will never be wounded, never be separate from anything, ever again.



After the death of her beloved father, the falconer learned to kill with the hawk, to enter the realm of darkness from which she'd longed to flee. In time, she took the gracious hand of life and found her way home. In time, she wrote the goshawk into fire.

In time. *But what is time?* This question has always unsettled me.

As far as we know, hawks have no sense of time. They live in an eternal present, clear-sighted, redolent of light.



By the time we reach our forties, we can hear rustlings of mortality, its scratching in the mind's attic, until one day, Death chews its way through the trapdoor and scurries into our lives. Our parents take their leave. My father, first.

My family, far away, had been eclipsed by the long shadow of time and

distance, replaced by friends who could not be kin, who could not have the kind of familial love that threads the needle of memory with the binding silk of acceptance and wholeness. Having left youth, I'd begun dredging my life, excavating its deep earth with language, disturbing the foundations in that old and comforting house of friendship. Time crumbled its once-sturdy walls; by the day of my father's death, the old house was in ruins. To salvage the wreckage, I wrote a novel of aerial flight. In time, I flew away from myself, kept writing, discovered joy. The book was stillborn. I did not lose grief.

Yet my father was still present. My mother donned his capacious spirit like a warm garment. When she left us twelve years later, she took him with her. It was then that he died. No trace of either is left in this world.

Where did they go? Time-and-space is a mystery, perhaps an illusion.



Throughout our marriage, you and I have spoken about endings and beginnings. You believe that life is a book with

chapters. When you finish one, it may vanish, but it does not disappear. Yet we do not know where it goes. From our vantage-point, this is called the passing of time, the name we give it because we are limited creatures, trapped behind the veil that human nature draws before our eyes. Perhaps it is like the hood that the falconer places on the hawk, so that its sight will not be overwhelmed by the new and unfamiliar. The falconer wrote of her unhooded goshawk, "(the bird's eyes) stared because the whole world had fallen into them at once."



I wrote, digging deep trenches in the barren soil, hoping to nourish it with language. My father's life became a mystery, lost in the hidden fold of time called death. There were days when I felt that sorrow was my fault, that I was made of a nonhuman substance to which nothing would adhere. I continued writing. The world outside my window became an over-exposed photo, bleached and drained of colour. It was spring; there was too much light. People drifted by me in an aimless dance, like dust motes in a

sunbeam. I wrote to fly, in flight. Without the old relationships, there was no form, no shape to anyone's existence. Bright and harsh, a splitting of atoms. Everything had died.

Or vanished. Disappeared. I am no longer sure which it was.



The art of falconry is an ancient one, and it is said that the wild species of today are the same as those which were raised and trained thousands of years ago. One may hold a peregrine falcon, a red-tail, a goshawk on the fist, and it is, in truth, a living relic of antiquity. Remove the artifice of time—the clock's relentless face and hands, the bells that toll the hour—and you will be flying the same bird that a tribesman might have flown in the time of Moses. To which I would add: You cannot prove that this is not so. We do not know how the universe folds in upon itself. We do not know where the past goes when it is gone.



Aboriginal people say that hawks are

messengers from the spirit world.

It was my good fortune that I married you, an avid and patient lover of birds. On my birthday years ago, a goshawk appeared in the trees at the back of our house—shadow-winged, a slash of white over its fire-eye, its chest a dusting of light and ash. You pointed it out, gave me a moment of wonder as a gift—the sight of a feral visitor, born of the generous blessing that is life itself. In a dark time, it might have brought comfort. Yet I do not recall the gift; this memory passed through the sieve of forgetting, and that saddens me. Yet even so, this wild creature came, a fierce apparition of extraordinary sight. With or without my seeing, it was there.

The goshawk flew on to grace another soul—a writer, a falconer across the sea. We hold in our hands her work: a great bird spun out of language, the love that formed it on the page, the letting go, the setting free, the patient soul who waits in hope for the beloved hawk's return. The firebrand alight in the trees, unhooded, eyes wide open.

Lyric Essay Award Winner (tie)