

Cynan Jones

# The Buzzard

We were driving along and I don't know what. I just hit it. We were driving right into the sun and it was at that time of year when it stays relatively low in the sky for a while. One of the first warm days.

The light was doing that blinding thing through the new leaves just at that part of the road. I guess the bird came out of the trees. Maybe the light off my windscreen confused it. Made it blind for just that second. The thump of hitting it made a sick feeling in me right off. I couldn't, no way, keep driving.

I cracked on the brake and turned the car round in a little junction and went back. I could see straight off it was a buzzard. It was there, just crouched down and beaten with its eye pointing at me wide open and I was sure that it looked at me – that it looked right at me.

I had my girl in the car and I said 'you'll have to drive' and I got out, taking an old shirt I had in the back seat. The cars were going past really quick. We had the hazards on and she stayed in the car and every time something went past it swayed the car like we were a boat or something, in water.

By the time I was out of the car the buzzard was trying to get down the road like a hang-glider. It had its wings out flapping, but the back of it wouldn't work. It looked pretty young. I knew about birds and it looked pretty young. When we were turning round for it, every time a car passed we were thinking

it was going to get hit, but at this point weirdly the road emptied up. That was weird, like seeing the bird in the eye had been.

I went after it with the shirt in my hands and got to it as it was going down the road, pulling with its wings.

I put the old shirt over it and picked it up and it was docile. I knew this was such a fierce bird, but it was just. I really don't know. I don't know how to say it.

I took it back to the car and put it with the shirt wrapped over it into a box. This car had come past and good for her the woman had slowed down with her hazards on and let me do my thing, and when I was carrying the buzzard she was saying about the RSPB but I knew that a vet or bird hospital would just put it down. That's all they could do.

I put the bird in the box, all quiet, and carried it on my lap in the car. Charm drove home. I didn't like that this beautiful fierce thing wasn't doing anything. It was just docile, there in the box.

We got back to the farm and I looked at it properly. The dog came over and sniffed at the box and I just gave it a warning to steer clear. You could see the dog was pretty happy the sun was out like it was a great relief and it just went and found itself a spot.

I took the buzzard out of the box and unwrapped the shirt and looked over its joints and bones, but I couldn't feel anything broke. Thing was, its

legs were just useless. Hanging down. It didn't have the broken bones to feel, not in its wings. I went over its ribs and its breastbone and they were clear and there were no sharp edges and the bird didn't react with pain anywhere. But its legs were just hanging back there, straight out, like I'd seen pheasants' legs and things that I'd hung up after hunting them; but there was no life in the legs – no grip, no flinch. Nothing when I touched them. So I went back over its backbone again but there was nothing sharp or out of place.

It had these beautiful big brown eyes like mine. That sounds weird to tell you; but they were clear, strong brown eyes like I have and are the only things I'm proud of, with the pupils dilating and pulsing in the middle. There was no fear in them.

Charm had got some gloves that I thought I would need. I used to keep a bird and I knew what could happen so I got her to fetch out the garden gloves she had of leather. But they were all dried up and hardened and I couldn't have felt things with them anyway. It was like me and the bird were okay though, and I knew deeply that it wouldn't bite me or go for me. I still had this weird thing that it was looking at me. It was like it was saying just fix me, I'm ok. This is no big thing. It was like a car stuck in the mud just waiting for someone to push it back onto the track and get going.

I put the bird in this bigger box on the yard and went in and mixed up some sugar and water. Then I used this syringe I had from when I blocked up my ears and had to loosen up the wax with warm olive oil and I fed the bird with the mixture. It perked up. It put up its head and kept this watch on me,

like you could imagine a chick would do with a parent bird. And I fed it a couple of mouthfuls of the sugary water, letting it swallow, hearing that, in this weird knowledgeable way it was actually taking the stuff. But its feet were just not reacting. It was more awake but I knew that could just be the sugar.

I put it back in the box and took it upstairs to the bathroom, just out of the sun coming in. I wanted to see what would happen. I'd seen birds before, just in shock, that looked done but suddenly woke up and off they went.

I left the lid of the box open thinking even if it gets out it's not such a thing to get it out of the bathroom and free, out through the skylight. I knew it wouldn't though. I knew it was up. I knew it had had it.

I went back outside as if I was thinking it wouldn't get better if I watched it. It was warm out. You get unused to the sun here, but it's like your body remembers, as soon as you feel it. This first sunshine.

Sun has a sound that comes with it. Later on in the year it will be the sound of grass being cut and machines working, of heavier traffic on the coast road. It will come with a smell of gorse giving out a coconut scent. With a constantly electric sound of swallows. But not now. Now it's this full rich quiet thing, the way Charm is when she's just lying with me. That quiet insideness of when you take a drink and let the drink stay in your mouth a while. It's as if everything is letting warmth come in to it.

I went back a bit later to see if the bird was walking round in the bottom

of the box. Or lifting its wings. I kind of decided I would give it the night and inside I was secretly hoping it would die quietly in the box on its own, peaceful there, in the night.

When I went back a bit later again it had sicked up. There was this stinky wet pellet that had come out of it, and loads of water, probably the water I'd put in, and it was soaked on its feathers. The water and sick messed it up a bit and took some of its dignity. Its eyes were so alive though. Kept looking right at me with this honest to God look like I thought it believed I could save it. I haven't had that before with animals. Mainly they know when they're beat.

I cleaned out the box and found that the pellet wasn't a pellet just a weird grey mess like silt, and I put newspaper down in the box and put it, ticking to it like maybe it understood that, back into the box. It was such a fierce and beautiful thing. It was such a beautiful, alive and patient thing, with only that patience and possession a thing that could be fierce, was supposed to be fierce, can have. And I knew I couldn't do it. I knew I couldn't wait for it to die.

I had this thing when I took a deep breath. I really did that. It wasn't a movie star thing. Everybody else was getting down into the garden for some outdoor supper. We'd decided because it was sunny to eat outside for the first time in the year.

The bird kept looking me in the eye. It wouldn't take its eyes off me, like I don't think it had since I went back for it and it had let me pick it up and not fought. I had stepped in once I went back and not let it get just run on

by a truck or something, I had stepped in. And I really felt a sense of that. I knew what I had to do and it was a massive betrayal.

I went in and I took the keys and I unlocked the gun cabinet. I didn't want to talk to anyone. I didn't want to make it into something. They were all taking things down for the supper outside where we sit in the garden looking over the fields to the sea. I didn't bring it up to them. I didn't want them to be thinking of it and of how I would feel.

I was still doing this whole deep breath thing but was okay as I knew it was something I had to look in the eye like the buzzard had looked at me. I took out two cartridges and got the bird in the box and took it a little way out down the lane.

I asked myself very clearly that I wasn't doing this because I couldn't wait for it to die, like the blackbird, and the beaten up rook, and the owlet that had wrapped itself up in the nettles, all in my past. But I knew absolutely that it wasn't that. I could. But I think I had gone back for it because of dignity and I knew from the blood in its mouth and the way of its beak open, and the coughed up mess of the smashed inside of its guts that it was busted inside and bleeding to death from within itself and that couldn't be the way for it to die in the night, with its wide eyes open and the breath coming from it in a weird way that sounded content, like the purr of a cat.

I put it down gentle in the sunshine on the grass and walked a bit away. Still it was looking at me, wouldn't take its eyes off, but not with this look of fear, just of trust. I had in two cartridges and I went about ten feet away and I

was worried because I'd never shot anything from close before nor in cold blood like this for whatever reason, not just like this with it in the grass and me. I was thinking of dignity. I was thinking of quickness. I knew once I had stepped in I had to do this and that this fell to me.

I could feel the sun on my neck and thought it would be the same thing the buzzard felt. That warm sun. I had this weird thing then. That the sun is just this fierce thing dying.

I took the step back and put up the gun and had this weird thing thinking this is okay, here, in the sun and the grass. When I raised the gun I couldn't see it in the eye anymore. Then I pulled.

I'd put the buzzard down on its side so its breast was to me, so I knew I would hit in the important stuff. But I aimed for the head.

The bird shifted a jolt and there was this little smoke coming from it, and it did one horrible hunch after the shot that I thought I'd have to shoot it again.

But when I got up to it, ten foot to it, I picked it up, its beautiful wings, and there was no head. Its beak was there, but bottom and top totally split and separate, and the rest of the place was raw like minced pork. One loud bang.

I picked up the bird and couldn't decide and first of all put the bird in the hedge for something to take. But that didn't feel right and I couldn't walk off.

I had this weird thing for it. Like I had let it down.

I picked it back up and carried it back and put it back in the box, with the newspaper round it, wrapped up. It wasn't anything anymore. Like a few pounds of something from a butcher. Everything had been in its eyes and they'd gone. I didn't know what the hell to do with it. It just wasn't anything. Everyone else was starting to eat supper and I had to go then and eat supper like that. I didn't know how the hell to feel.

We had the old barbecue wheeled out with a little fire of sticks in it because it wasn't so warm in the evening; there was just the sunlight. Things hadn't warmed up yet. The sunlight was catching the metal lid of the barbecue, glaring off. I kept thinking of the bird being blinded by the sun off my windshield.

We sat there then for a long time, watching the sun go. Everyone else went in. Charm knew what I was feeling inside but that was it. She didn't say too much. I'm not like that.

We sat there for a long time waiting to see the green flash. I didn't see anything. I don't know if it even really happens. Just a fierce thing dying.