

The Hawk
by Jules Chung

We swoosh toward church on wet roads under a sky with no feelings. You won't speak to me. That's typically true but more so on Sundays. You are thirteen so, of course, I am convinced I still have some say over you.

As we merge into the jughandle that dumps us out onto the road where the church is, you shout.

A hawk!

I glance upward and see nothing.

You hit your window with both hands.

Stop, you say.

I can't because there's no safe place on this road. I keep driving.

There's a baby hawk in the snow back there, you say. It's hurt.

Okay, I say.

I pull into the church parking lot because it's the best place to turn the car around to go back. Driving past rows of cars spattered with salt-snow, I make the left turn and then the next so we can exit.

You're going back?

You sound genuinely surprised, and I admit to myself that your surprise leaves a little bruise.

Of course, I say. A baby hawk is hurt.

Church has been the sorest point between us. You hate it. I don't love it, to be honest. It doesn't give me the same feeling it did when I was a kid. There isn't an army of ajummas dishing up amazing food at picnics or of ajusshis in white gloves and flourescent vests directing traffic in the parking lot. There's no glee from seeing all your Korean friends after a week of being "the only" at school. This church, to be honest, feels a lot like a work conference. But I love God, and I wish you did too. I am having a hard time admitting to myself that your Dad and I just aren't going to be able to make this particular ritual meaningful for you. It barely feels meaningful for us. Maybe that's what we're in denial about.

I drive back to the part of the road where you saw the hawk and slow down.

There! you say.

Pulling onto the shoulder and turning on the hazards, I'm not even sure what you're about to do. But I have complete faith it will be fine. You're uber-competent and always have been.

You get out of the car and walk the twenty feet to the snowbank with such purpose. The weather is misting and there is no traffic. You remove your orange puffer as you go.

In the mirrors, I see you crouch down toward something too low for me to see, and a few moments later, you're back at the car with something bundled against you. I stretch and open up

the passenger side. You climb in, curled protectively around your parcel, and close the door.

It didn't move, you say. Not even when I laid my jacket over it.

You balance the swaddled hawk on your lap with one hand and pull out your phone. As you tap away on the screen with your thumb, I take in the sight. Your long hair is pulled back into a ponytail, but the many loose strands in front hang damp and black as algae in front of your face. The hawk's head juts out from the spool of your jacket, which looks like a tiny duvet wrapped around a stuffed toy so realistic it bends the brain. And then my brain says *What are you talking about? The hawk IS real.*

I offer to hold her so you can search faster. Gently, you pass the raptor. We move and breathe slowly. We speak softly and slowly too. The young hawk has stunned us into reverence.

I hold her in my lap like a delicate football. She is still but her shiny amber eyes move, active and alert, taking in the inside of our minivan. Her brown and cream markings are beautiful but I resist stroking her head because she is wild, worthy of respect. I stare at her hooked beak and actually think about running my finger along the cutting-edge to see how sharp it is-- I'm not even scared at the thought of slicing my finger open-- but of course, I don't. I even fantasize about unfurling the jacket to see if she'll open her wings. I want to see their full span, to see if maybe she'll

even flap them and swoop around, screeching. But of course, I don't.

Dark curiosity is something we share, but you don't know that. I repress the thought of your scars. I wonder if I should tell you about my years of cutting. I wonder if it would help with whatever the brawl inside you is.

After a minute, the hawk's neck twists. She looks here and there. We never sexed the bird, but I am using 'her' as the default. The idea of three girls in the car together charms me. You put your phone away, and although you don't ask, I gently pass her back to you. You should be with her as long as possible.

It says we should just leave the hawk where it is, you say. Because the mother is probably nearby. Oops.

You bring a hand up to your forehead and comb some of the loose hair back with your lovely fingers as you stare down at the hawk. Guilt spills over your face.

We didn't know, I say softly. And I'm sure we're not the first not to know and to try to help in a situation like this.

There is a screech. We look up through the windshield. An adult hawk circles. Her dramatic wings stretch outward. The long feathers at the tips flare, like giant eyelashes, which is an apt association because if that is the mother who's lost her child, she is nothing but an eye up there, desperate and searching.

Junior! I say quietly, but in cawing tones. Where are you?

I am play-acting the voice of the hawk Mom. You actually laugh. It's been so long since you laughed with me. For a few seconds, it feels like old times.

I start the car and loop around once more so we can stop right where we found her, and also so we can steal a few more moments. You hold her lightly as a bomb. I pull over and you get out. You take the baby hawk back to the same spot, place her on the snow, and unwrap her. She takes an awkward step and opens her wings, but still doesn't seem able to fly. You look up to see if the adult hawk is still circling. I look too. The mother--if that was the mother--seems gone.

You stand with your jacket in your hand, keeping watch over her as she keeps up her gawky movements in the snow. I text you: The mother won't come back if we stay. You know I'm right and get back into the car.

You put your seatbelt on but keep your jacket in your lap. I don't tell you to put it on. Saying something like "It's cold" or "You should put on your jacket" would feel profane.

So I guess we're going to church now? you ask.

Your voice sounds like the sky would sound if it could talk.

Let's just go get lunch today. What do you feel like?

Really?

A stream of light.

Yes.

[1223 words]