

Bird on the Roof

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The angry screech of the window resists my force. Despite its adamant protests, I slowly slide it open, and I'm greeted by a warm breeze. It's become so normal to me, yet every single time I can't help but feel a sense of newness—and caution about it. Open the window. Take in the air. Right foot out. Looooong stretch. Keep your balance! Left foot out. Balance! Shimmy out of the opening. And then see.

What I look at changes a lot. Usually, it's looking out past the houses to the large expanse of trees and fields across the way. Past that, sometimes a tapestry of a sunset. On lucky, sleepless mornings, it's a herd of deer prancing along in their world of simplistic instinct. The roof is damp and the air has a strong, but not uninviting, chill.

Other times I skip the last step and engage my senses in other ways. I crawl to the center of the roof, lie down, and I feel. On summery weekends I feel the growing warmth of the roof and the glaring sun attack my skin. I feel the water-like breeze calm my nerves while the roof scratches my back and shoulders. I close my eyes and spread into a starfish. I feel gravity sitting on my chest. I feel the world turn.

One blank day, I sat on my roof to read. The day was bland and void of personality. The warm overcast day had put its muggy spell on the neighborhood. There was little movement within homes, and even the usually lively field animals seemed to be napping. It smelled like rain. Except for a few passing cars and rustling leaves, there was little to be heard, so I wore one headphone. I was so lost inside my book that the sudden chirp of a bird startled me. The bird itself wasn't very unique, a bluish-gray little thing with dark gray stripes and a boring song. But what is unusual about the bird is how close it was.

I looked up and saw it perched on the rain gutter by my feet. On a timid day like this, a timid-looking bird should be home asleep, but there she was, perched at my feet. I set my book aside and watched her.

On only this day could I say her drab song was "music". Her ashy blue feathers might as well have been butterfly wings, they way they stood out against the day. I held her gaze as I inched closer to her, careful to plant my feet. She let me reach out until I was mere inches away before flitting away from me. She perched in the tree on the far corner of the roof. I crawled across to her and lay on my stomach. She sang to me like Sandalphon the Archangel.

Later that night I learned that she was a Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher, usually very shy, quiet birds with soft songs. Very common in South Carolina. Sometimes I look outside my window and wonder if she's among the other hundreds of identical gnatcatchers. I like to think I'd recognize her if I saw her, but I know I wouldn't.

I'm still curious about her. How is it that on an especially drab day an uncharacteristically brave, common bird can look like a miracle? How is it she could alight my senses when normally I'd glance over her without notice? Why is it that when you take your time to enjoy and sense the world around you, everything is beautiful? She makes me think of all the simple pleasures I've missed.

So maybe when I open my window it's only slightly creaky, but when you listen, it sounds like a scream. Maybe my balancing act on the roof is really just a few seconds of me stumbling, but it feels like life or death. Maybe the beautiful stained glass sunset is just like every other, but when you look, each one is a masterpiece.

Maybe the boring little Blue-Grey Gnatcatcher, when you focus on her, is actually a gift.

Why is it that when you take your time to enjoy and sense the world around you, everything is beautiful?

