

Boy and Bird

"Bash!" his mother called "Bash, come and open your present"

He ran to the living room. Please let it be a bird. Please, he prayed.

"Where is it?" he looked about the room. He saw his mothers oak chest of drawers, decorated with dozens of frames of people Bash couldn't begin to name. He saw the dreadful armchair that no one dared sit on as it was falling apart but his father insisted on keeping it, as it had been his grandmothers. But he saw no enormous cage. No jet-black bird. No animal fit for a soldier.

"Happy Birthday, Sebastian." His father smiled at him and eyed the back door, Bash soled outside.

Sitting on the veranda was a petty cage. A bright red bird. An animal fit for a child. Bash froze and eyed his new pet.

"Its called a Cardinal"

"Its not an Eagle."

Tears begun to swell in his eyes. The Cardinal tapped the cage with its orange beak and cried. Bash walked over to the cage and slid his finger through the bars. The Cardinal ran his beak along the finger. Bash sniffed. The bird hopped along the rod of which he was perched upon, as if putting on a show.

"Raphael," Bash whispered.

"Aahhh, wise choice. After the great healing Archangel," his father preached.

"After the Ninja Turtle with the red headband." Bash responded obliviously.

"Raph," Bash whistled for his bird. He had trained it to fly down the driveway and perch on the mailbox. But training him to retreat was proving difficult.

"Raph," he whistled again. Raph sang out from the mailbox. Bash grew frustrated and stormed down the driveway.

"Raph! I've said this ten billion times, when I whistle come back,"

The cardinal left his position and flew to Bash's shoulder. He gently nipped at his ear and ran the top of his head along Bash's jaw. Bash laughed.

"Porter!"

Bash's attention left his bird and was diverted to the caller. Bash saw an immense bird clawed to the shoulder. Its jet-black wings spread the width of its master and its vile, yellow eyes, which were hollowed into its ice, white-feathered skull, stalked Bash.

"Hello Jonathan"

"I heard you got a bird, let me see."

Bash took Raph from his shoulder, who balanced easily on the fingers. Jonathan snickered.

"You call that a bird?"

"It's a Cardinal," Bash responded with despise.

"Can it speak on demand?"

"No"

"Can it play dead?"

"No"

"Can it hunt?"

"Why would he need to hunt? I feed Raph,"

"Watch!"

Jonathan swiftly whistled twice. The beast upon his shoulder released its grip and flew into the sky, out of sight. Moments later the eagle reappeared, fish in mouth. Bash watched in disbelief. The eagle clawed back into Jonathan's shoulder and waited. Jonathan turned his head slightly to his bird without word.

"Will you let him eat it?"

"Young Porter, sometimes we have to make sacrifices to get what we want," he paused and snatched the fish from the eagle's mouth "Do you want a bird that loves you or a bird that is worth having?" Jonathan questioned despicably.

"What's he called?"

"Lucifer"

Bash wanted a bird that hunted. A bird that was worth having.

"Eat!" Bash commanded. He placed three worms of which he had dug from the garden into Raph's bowl. Raph looked at the worms and back to Bash.

"Eat stupid bird!"

Raph did nothing.

"Fine, have it your way," Bash spat whilst taking away the bowl. Raph cried.

Throughout the night Bash refused to hear the weeps of his pet.

"Morning stupid bird," Bash greeted Raph.

Bash walked over to the cage and slid his finger through the bars. The cardinal nipped his finger. Bash shrieked. His mother rushed to his aid but Bash's eyes did not leave the glare of which his predator had upon him.

"Just a little bit of blood, no matter,"

"The stupid bird bit me!"

"Excuse me young man, do not use that language in this house." His mother scowled. "Now go and get clean your room, your cousins are arriving on the weekend." She left.

"Why can't you be like Lucifer and hunt you boring twat!"

Raph squawked.

"Hi, Lourdes" Bash kissed his cousin on the cheek.

"Bash," She replied, "How was your birthday?"

"Good, I got a bird"

"I know! Can I see? My Blue Jay is doing quite terrifically,"

"Raph has changed," Bash sighed.

"In what way?"

"He is not my friend anymore,"

"Oh" Lourdes bewildered "Is this him?"

"Yeah"

Lourdes opened Raph's cage and reached for him.

"No don't, he will hurt you,"

She took Raph on her hand. The bird nipped her finger, drawing blood. Lourdes winced but did not dismiss Raph.

"Lourdes you should put him back, I'm so sorry,"

Lourdes ignored her cousin. "Its very strange"

"What's strange?"

She petted Raph who relished.

"Cardinals are not violent in nature. They symbolize hope and love. It is strange that you spoke highly of Raph and were dependent on him but now you are asking him to be something that he is not as a result of jealousy and ambition."

"I'm not jealous!"

Lourdes shook her head.

"How do we fix him?" Bash asked.

"It is not a matter of we. You once found it in your heart to accept and care for your bird. You also found it in your heart to manipulate him into a violent creature. You need to decide whether Raph is worthy of your ambitious desires for him or whether you, Bash, are worthy of the love and devotion that comes with the companionship of a Cardinal."

Bash placed birdseed into Raph's bowl. Their eyes met and Bash realized he needed his friend. Raph began to eat.

"I love you," Bash whispered to his bird.

Bash slid his fingers through the bars into the cage, and held them before Raph. Raph ran his bright, red-feathered crown along the fingers and hummed.