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## Hawkarm

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I crushed the left side of my body up against the stadium wall in an effort to keep my mother as distant as possible. She sat primly glossing through *Good Housekeeping*, ignoring me, ignoring the aquatic show, only turning away to chide my three-year-old cousin Henry at his every demand for highly processed zoo food.

Everything changed when Donna came. Donna, a gleam of feathers ripping through the air. Donna the hawk, red-tailed and predatory, as Leonard the zookeeper would recite into his mic like a slightly dyslexic schoolboy forced to read aloud. The hawk perched on his leather-braced arm, shifting from foot to foot at every boom of his voice. Halfway into his speech Leonard stammered out an abruptly recalled warning to the audience:

Under no circumstances should you raise your arm, unless you want Donna to land on you. While Leonard stated the Newtons of force in Donna's grip, I glanced at my mother. Occupied by Henry crawling on the sticky floor between strangers' legs to chase bits of lost popcorn, she hadn't at all noticed my arm nonchalantly reaching to scratch the back of my neck.

My blood pumped thick in my veins, equal parts adrenaline and resentment, thinking of the hawk, remembering my mother's every transgression.

The night before, my mother had peeled the skins from the chicken before serving it for dinner. All that golden-greased skin plunking seemingly out of existence as she dribbled the saturated richness into the shining black maw of the trash. And by way of explanation she'd only said, "It's healthier, Terrence. We're healthier."

My arm, now sneaking up the wall, trembled.

With sweet patience I'd laid in bed until I heard my mother's snores, and I'd plucked those same skins from the bin, and, vulturous, gobbled down the sweet carrion.

And now in my mother's I'm-doing-this-for-you tone my mind echoed back:

Under no circumstances should you—

My arm shot straight up.

Donna propelled herself off Leonard. "Oh, f---ing Christ!" he bellowed into his mic. The crowd gaped in confusion, a collective organism craning a mass of necks toward Leonard's gaze. Donna keened out a delighted knifefnote. "Terrence!" my mother yelped in half fear, half rage. I grinned into her livid face, and she fumbled her way over petrified onlookers' laps. The hawk closed in.

Donna alighted gracefully. Talons burrowed into fat flesh and muscle, came close to clicking against bone. I curled my arm to my chest, Donna still attached. The screams of the audience frightened her, and she tore at my face, and she tore at my mother's swatting hand. That night she caught me, my mother. Midnight and I knelt before the trash bin, surrounded by soiled paper plates and crumpled napkins, licking juicy chicken skin residue from my fingers.

She'd approached with stealth.

I startled out of my gorging when she clenched my shoulder. A scrap of chicken skin plopped lifeless to the floor. In the pitch dark she glared into my eyes. She then sighed, released me, straightened her bathrobe, and in an act of profound weariness went back to bed. The worst of it was my waiting for the click of her door, and my bending to finish off that dropped skin.

The ER doctors sutured the hand of my weeping mother as I watched, shame-tongued with the taste of chicken.