

Wheet WHEET!

by Janet Ruth

Curve-billed thrasher roots around the patio
flinging bark from garden to sidewalk,
a smack-talking juvenile delinquent
 strews trash and
 tags the neighborhood,
his shrieks like rusty hinges on our backyard gate.
He rockets around the corner of the house
 pursuing his crony,
 barely misses my left ear.

If he discovers a western screech-owl
 sunning in its nest box doorway,
or spies a greater roadrunner attacking
 his hatchling offspring,
he does not back down.
With his screams, churrs, and feathery ruckus,
 owl drops back into the box,
 roadrunner scuttles,
 head hunched between shoulders.
With fluffed plumage, his triumphant look says,
If I could lift this middle feather on my wing . . . !

Thrasher flies to the cypress crown
 for a session of *wheet-WHEET*-ing,
elicits call-and-response from neighbors
 up the arroyo and down the street.
Then it is back to scrabbling
 among the bark bits,
 swinging his scythe-like beak,
 a grim reaper
seeking more grubby souls to harvest.

Creator of chaos, trasher of sidewalks,
 he drives my husband to frenzies
 of porch-sweeping.
Brash owner of sandy soil,
 bright, desiccated air,
 thorny chollas on which
 the unwary are crucified,
he probes with saber beak,
 glares with baleful yellow eyes.
Then, at dawn, he whispers
 an indescribably sweet and complex croon,
 like a saxophonist
 improvising,

as if he knows that this gritty scrap
of New Mexico desert,
 this dawn of opal sky
set in gold with fading diamonds,
is to be the stage upon which
 a singular blazing event is enacted—

resurrection of the sun.

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