

A Bird's Life

From the Journal of Anamika*

A true story of a survivor of domestic violence depicting her love marriage, the controlling and violent behavior of her husband, their divorce, her denial, her self-flagellation and later suicide attempt, and her eventual coping mechanisms.

1974

There is a Bird flying freely in the wide blue sky. It flies over the tall buildings, perches on the branches of the green trees and, when it feels like it, the Bird stretches its wings and flies around more. It moves up and down, this way and that, sits when it chooses, eats what it wants, and goes where its free will takes it. There is no hurry or worry and there are no restrictions. The Bird is graceful and attractive as it enjoys life.

There is a boy standing on the ground watching this Bird. He thinks: "What a beautiful Bird! I wish I could have it." So he catches this Bird and puts it in a fancy cage. He feeds it and loves this Bird very much and takes a great deal of care of it. However, he is never sure if the Bird will fly away. "What if someone opens the door of the cage in my

absence or I myself forget to latch the door?" he wonders. So one day he clips the wings of this Bird in such a manner that it never will be able to fly again.

Now the boy is happy. "This Bird is mine. I own the Bird. No one can take it away from me. The Bird can't fly away, even if it tries." The boy is pleased with himself.

But what fun is there if no one else knows about his priceless possession? And naturally, being a Mama's boy, the first person he can think of sharing his happiness with is his mother. Excited with the idea, jumping and dancing, the boy runs to where his parents live with the cage in his hand. The Bird is buffeted from one end of the cage to the other and is struggling hard to remain on the perch, but the boy is not paying any attention to the

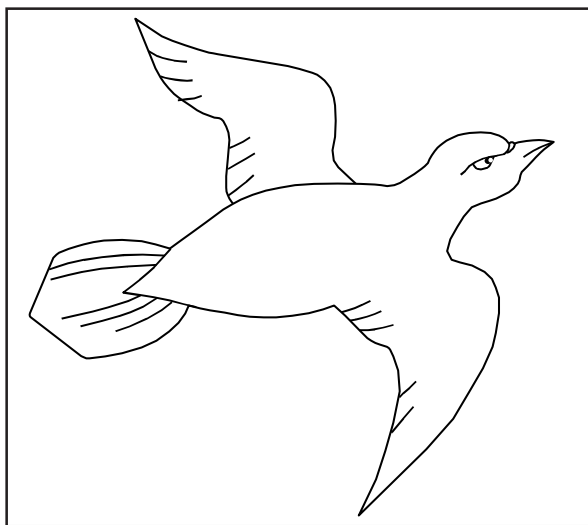
Bird. He shouts, "Mom, Mom, look what I have here!"

Now this Bird had nothing special about it. It was not even pretty in the way the world judges good looks. But the Bird's beauty resided in its grace while flying and its enjoyment of freedom in life. This freedom was gone and with it went its grace. The Bird was now neither pretty nor beautiful. It was no longer even attractive and his parents did not like it. However, they did not wish to hurt their son's feelings and hoped his fancy would soon end. The mother responded diplomatically, "You can keep it if you like —" and no more was said.

The boy saw his parents' reaction and they did not fool him. He was hurt but this made him take care of the Bird much more. Day and night he hovered around the Bird.

He himself did not rest or allow the Bird to be in peace either—both of them were getting tired and exhausted, cranky and cross with one another.

Gradually, in time, the boy forgot why he had ever loved this Bird so much in the first place. The original beauty that had attracted him was gone. He too started seeing the Bird through the eyes of his parents and others with whom he tried to share his joy. "The Bird is definitely



*Anamika is the pseudonym the author has chosen for herself.

not pretty, not pretty at all. How silly of me to have wasted all my time, effort and energy on an ugly looking thing that is neither pleasing to the eyes nor useful. If anything, it only makes demands on me. I have to feed it, buy special Bird food, clean its cage, and pick up all the mess it makes. It sure is not worth all the trouble I have been taking.”

The boy kept thinking like this and it made him more and more resentful towards the Bird.

Meanwhile, what was happening to the Bird? It couldn't speak the language of the boy but it did have feelings and could think. Did the boy ever know that?

Unfortunately, there was no communication between the two...

I sometimes feel all this is happening right now in front of my eyes.

Thank God he finally agreed to go for counseling. It is even better that we are in marital therapy at his own initiative. I had been requesting he go for a long time but he did not agree, complaining that I am the one who is mentally ill. He didn't even like me to attend the parenting classes. Instead, he denied me permission, threatened, and physically abused me. So comparatively, his agreement to go with me for counseling is an improvement.

1975

The Bird is back, sitting in a corner, feeling sad because it is unable to fly and give happiness to the boy. “Only by my flying can the joy return to the boy, but my wings are clipped, the cage is closed, the doors and windows are shut. What am I to do? Just sit in that corner like the dumb Bird that I am and feel sorry for myself and the boy too because— because of so many things— everything. I don't even

care to list them. It's no use, it's all my fault.”

The Bird is very depressed.

This is very painful. Nothing is working out. This counseling is not taking us anywhere. He keeps wanting me to be “fixed”. Life, family, marriage, home cannot be like this. I have not seen any similar behavior in my childhood when I lived with my parents. I must explore what makes a healthy family, and if I am truly as sick as he says, then I must take the necessary steps to get well.

1976

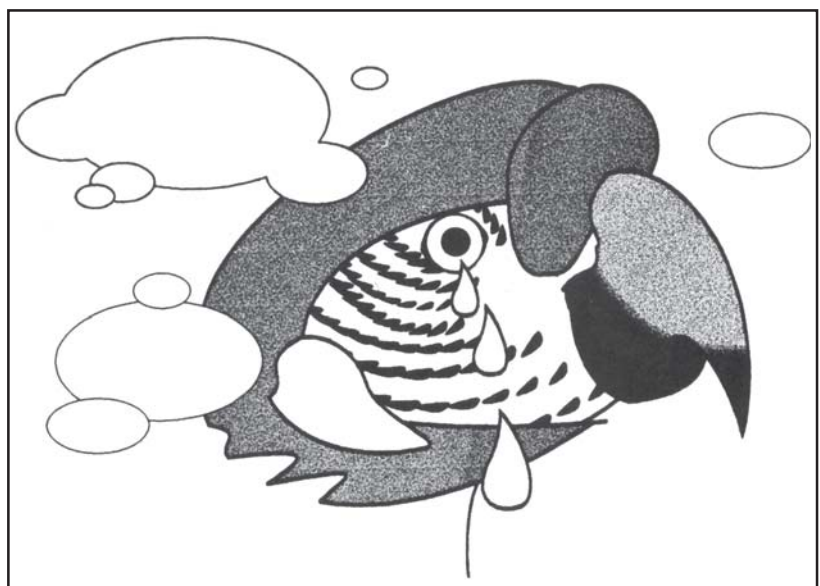
Suddenly this Bird which was sitting in the cage for so long, despondent and depressed, is thinking more and feeling a little less frightened: “This boy is going to shoo me away and here I am with clipped wings that can't help me fly anymore. What good is the open cage, open windows and bright blue sky out there! I am a helpless, incapable, ugly little Bird who is not loved or wanted by him and yet cannot adequately take care of myself, comfort him in return, or cuddle and nurture our baby.”

Suddenly there is a loud, clear, strong voice coming from somewhere, some invisible place, from everywhere, from nowhere in particular. “Oh, get up, Bird. What is the use of crying? Just think, what is the actual situation? That the cage is open and there is plenty of room for you to move about. You have your freedom, your coveted freedom, and the boy too can get his freedom and his own much desired happiness. After all, what do you want? No, you don't want to conquer the sky either. As I understand it, you want the joy of flying together, with freedom, you want back your gracefulness in flying and you also want happiness together.”

“Oh, stop it. I hate lectures. You don't comprehend. Leave me alone.” Bird is angry, dejected. The voice coaxes, “Come on, get up, spread your wings, hop, you can do it.”

The Bird reluctantly tries without saying anything, moving slowly, gazing down.

“Yes, that's right, skip, jump again, keep your wings spread out, there see! You were able to keep aloft for a little while. There, there, try again. Very good. Keep practicing. Take advantage of the opportunity.”



ANOOP KAMATH

The Bird continues its efforts...

He has given me an ultimatum. I do not want the marriage to dissolve and lose my daughter. I am terrified and at this point am willing to please him at any cost. Fortunately, my studies continue.

1977

The voice again: "Look, look at the boy! Look at his face, see the twinkle in his eyes! You see the interest in you lighting up? You haven't lost him. He recognizes your striving and your endeavours. But be careful of his power hungry desires."

The boy possessively puts the Bird back in the cage. This is a golden cage, much smaller, oppressive.

Soon the 'honeymoon' stage is over.

The Bird is lying on the hard, hot rock all by itself, sobbing. It is bleeding profusely, devastated. There are multiple wounds. It appears as if the Bird's body and heart have been cut up in a million pieces and each fragment is trembling and shivering in great trepidation at the dreadful occurrence.

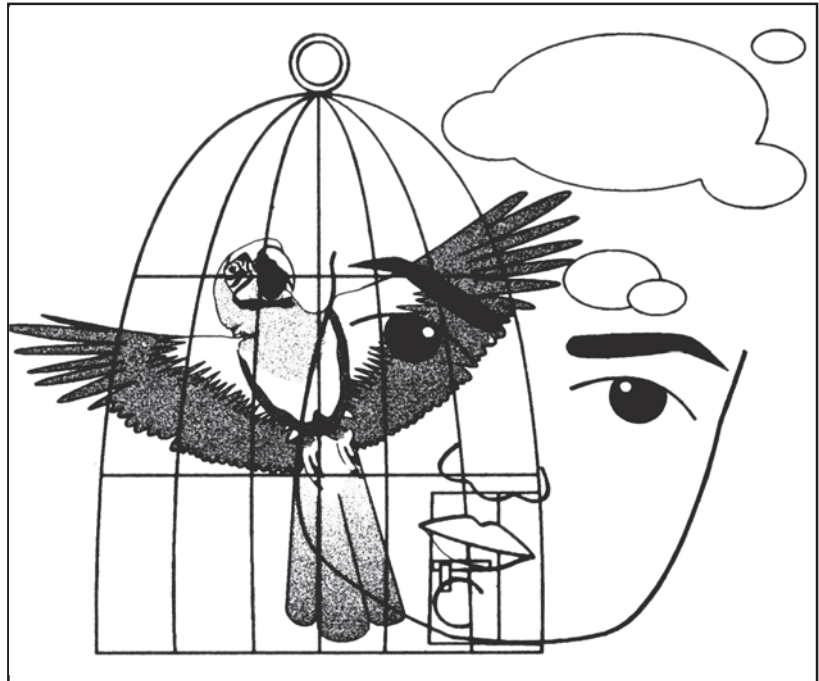
"It is hopeless, I am worthless, I deserve to die."

Violent abuse, followed by divorce and a subsequent suicide attempt.

1984

A long time has passed since the Bird's last injuries. The wounds have healed now but the body is in pain at every movement. There are ugly visible scars. Everybody stare with strange looks and turn their faces away in disgust. No one talks to the Bird...

I moved near the family. But they don't fathom my pain nor do they nourish my self-image. Instead I feel I have plunged from the frying pan into the fire. I cannot sustain my



self-esteem in such an environment. There is no acceptance from society either. I don't perceive any regard for myself. I recognize I have to heal and grow using my own strength.

Eventually the Bird comes to a conclusion: "It's no use, this too is unhealthy."

There is the voice once more: "That's right, try to fly again. You know when you fly, no one else

holds your wings extended on your behalf, so you must try again, by your own strength. Now see, you can float, glide, yes, dive down, perch on the branch, rest a little and fly again. Oh yes! You can't do it all at once, but try and try, try again. As long as you try, there is hope. Hope in yourself gives hope to others in a similar situation. That grin on your face is the proof." □

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