

quiet as a flower

script

Julian Lass

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part one

Two buzzards live near me above a marshy meadow with long grass. Sometimes, sitting at an upstairs window in warmer weather, I see them circling high in thermal currents. To spot a buzzard is like meeting the eyes of an elusive lover. Their flight is a play of shadow and light, a delicate dance performed on the stage of the open sky. They are hard to find, hard to follow, and they soon move out of sight. Now though, it is February, and as the air is too cold for lift, they stay close to the ground.

One day, while at walking in the snow and coming out from behind a hedgerow, I catch sight of a large shape in the trees on the other side of the marsh. Slowing my pace, I try to glimpse what I thought I saw. There, tucked almost out of sight, flattened into the background, hidden in the falling snow, is a buzzard perched on a branch. It blends in and out of sight until I start to doubt that it is still there, or that I saw it at all.

My presence has provoked a response. A second buzzard reveals itself by taking flight from behind the tree, watching the ground intently, and then slowly sinks out of view to the right. Lines of flight, worked out in advance, criss-cross the field's contours. And I have lost the first buzzard now. I know where it is roughly, but my eyes can't distinguish it sufficiently. It flits in and out of my gaze. I slowly edge back to conceal myself again behind the corner of the hedgerows, my cover.

I stay quiet as a flower.

If I didn't know it was there, I wouldn't be able to see the buzzard at all, it is blending so perfectly into the contours of the treeline. When I glimpse it again, I see it has a wary eye on me. I realise I have been spotted before I can even try to clumsily hide myself. It knows I'm there. Perhaps because I have broken the normal flow of things.

Perhaps we, and I include the buzzards, have a special ability to understand things that are not just what can be seen, heard, or touched, another way to know the world. Is this special ability something that humans and animals share? A wary whisper of a sense, an extra 'estimative' faculty that helps us know friendship, or danger? If this whispered understanding exists, a part of us knows more than our senses tell us. A part of us knows the world in a way senses cannot.

This special knowing was thought possible by the Islamic philosopher Ibn Sina (Avicenna). He called it *wahm*, and with *wahm* the mind is not a passive receptacle, it reaches out to the world and to things, as all that is within reach calls back. And in the reaching, what is hidden or only potentially present is brought into 'appearance'. Direct experience of phenomena precede all linguistic or visual representation.

Trees full of pearls, the marsh as sweet as honey, buzzard and human body wholly soul, everything as part of a single substance without the separation that characterises much thinking today.

Everything, even things we might think are quite ordinary, can turn into something special with this reaching out. I go out to discover the world like a detective. And when I do, I find the hidden in ordinary places.

At first I don't understand every detail in what I find. Even when I focus my attention further, there are parts I miss. Like artists of old who painted over their own canvases, understanding comes in layers: you can see what is on top,

but there is far more hiding underneath. And *wahm* is both what appears and hides, and these can differ, so there are different views of things. Things that can appear both universal and particular.

The brown and the dull twinkle.

It is a buzzard, yes, but it is also THIS. It sits humming its hymn of its 'buzzardness'. Feel the buzzard feel its unique heft, the singular that punctuates the world. In its soaring silhouette, it is a keeper of secrets that whisper the wind. I feel a quiet between us, and in that quiet, I find the universe.

No more words.
In the name of this place,
I drink in with my breathing,
Stay *quiet as a flower*,
So the birds will start singing.

part two

The next day I return to the marsh to try to film the buzzards. I can't immediately see them. So I try to sense familiar shapes in the distant tree line. Often I am wrong, and what I thought was a buzzard turns out to be something else entirely. But then, sometimes I know that they are there, and when this happens, in a flash something has taken place. Elements that might otherwise remain in a hidden state of potential presence are brought into focus. Yet, even then, they're not fully visible, they don't quite lose their prior state of hiddenness.

In this moment, the moment of coming to appearance, something remains: a 'remnant' of various modes of potential hiddenness—much as all that is potentially forgotten remains with what is remembered.

The remnant is what remains quiet. What is *felt* rather than *known* is the doubt and uncertainty of the hidden, without the definitive clarity that reason often seeks; what remains is a fragile balance between what appears and what is inapparent. The remnant, in its quiet, hidden state, both challenges and acknowledges the seen and the articulated.

The buzzard is there, it's right there. Look! Look, and soon enough a head will reveal itself, an eye will turn to assess you. Yet something remains that resists my attempt to investigate properly and belongs so much to that which does not easily give itself. When brown feathers shine for a brief moment—a quick stretch of a wing a darting eye—this soon gives way again to slipping away and being lost from view, a return to vague contours. And if I were to walk by without stopping, none of this would make any special impression upon me. The buzzard exists in a realm that I touch upon but never fully capture. Knowledge exists in an intermediary state, my understanding is never complete or final. There is no remnant which is not *quiet as a flower*.