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The Song

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There once was a boy who could sing down birds. Every day after chores he ventured off to the woods behind his parents' house to summon the small aviators with his unearthly song. And they came—daring thrushes and bawdy jays, the shy finch and the wheeling lark. Some late, long evenings, when the boy barely whispered his tune, he was attended only by the low thrum of bright hummingbird wings. Always, the boy's own laughter ended his song, releasing the birds into cool and starry nights.

The boy's gift was not a secret. His parents knew of his song and often—on the way to the clothesline or the shed—would glimpse the boy and his cohorts, their shadows flickering in the high pines' shade. It was like this for years.

One harsh winter, however, gathered around a barren table, the parents instructed the boy that he would have to sing down some birds so his family could survive until spring. A good boy, he did as he was told. In the vibrant cold, as if picking berries, the boy's parents plucked a few scant birds from the air.

The boy never sang again. For a long time he felt great sadness and shame. However, growing up—falling in and out of love, learning to hate his work, reading some philosophy, losing his friends—his reasons changed. *If I sing and the birds come, the world is not merely indifferent but ruthless and cruel. If I sing and the birds do not come, the world is not merely uncaring but pitiless and grim. I have the world trapped,* he thought.

And that song suited him.