



An Odd Bird

P. K. Butler

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A gifted girl chooses a winged teacher and gains knowledge beyond the classroom in the intriguing fantasy novel An Odd Bird.

In P. K. Butler's fantasy novel *An Odd Bird*, a girl's love of birds reflects her mysterious connection to living in the present.

When Claire was three, her father died. After returning home from attending his funeral in Ireland, and while wearing a shirt with a hawk on it, she became lost in the woods; she was found with the help of a hawk. Thereafter, Claire kept encountering birds that matched those on her clothes.

As her childhood continues, Claire is homeschooled by her mother, who spends considerable time in the grocery store she reopened. Claire is often left to her own devices. She grows up learning from her winged friends in the forest. Her entry into sixth grade introduces her to other children, including a bully. Her avian curiosity also leads her to pursue an encounter with Jerry, an adult who is known as the Chicken Man, and his adoring chicken.

Claire has no fear of the unknown, leading to an undercurrent of fear concerning her well-being. Still, this is made secondary to the book's reoccurring themes about the importance of outside play and learning beyond traditional time in the classroom. On occasion, unbeknownst to her mother, Claire decides not to hop on the bus; instead, she concocts farces with the hope that she will find the bird on her shirt. Her time at school is skipped over in favor of coverage of her bus rides to and from school; Claire is often focused on getting home. Jerry and the hawk who rescued her as a child, Big Red, seem like more suitable teachers to her.

The story moves at a steady pace, following the rhythms of Claire's days. The revelation of her true calling is delayed until the book's last few pages, though. Instead of rushing toward it, the book concentrates on fleshing out Claire's world: the forest is her fantasy land, and her animal magnetism is revealed apace with her adventures. She is drawn to the forest, and birds are drawn to her. But calling birds to her is a mere fraction of what Claire is capable of. As she gains confidence because of her forest magic, refreshing problem-solving methods are suggested.

A captivating, unusual girl becomes an advocate for her avian friends in the delightful fantasy novel *An Odd Bird*.

ERIN NESBIT (April 24, 2023)

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