***How to Tame Your Bird and Gain its Trust***

I opened the cage, clamped my hand tightly so he couldn’t escape and took the bird out.

I had my chemistry set, bought before she left, she’d wrapped it in paper covered with little robins, red blotches against the snow, startled faces on bare branches. She’d hidden it under her softly folded jumpers in her wardrobe.

‘Was it the penetration of Mom’s darning needle or had I held on too tight?’

I knew I should get the book from the front room, the one she’d left wrapped all shiny for Gina. A book to tell you how to look after your pet bird, how to tame it and gain its trust, but I didn’t want to go into the front room. It’s huge window an eye nosing in. Dad had said,

‘Don’t let anyone see you, they might realise you’re at home alone, I can’t afford childminders now. You’ll have to grow up.’ he said. ‘Look after yourself.’

It was okay for Gina; she was still sent to the Gaeltacht. Dad said it was booked before Mom left; he’d already paid for it. Gina left in the car without looking back. I wondered did Mom do that too.

I opened the chemistry set and laid out all I’d need. Gina had said the only thing left worth coming back to was, her bird.

‘The only thing with a heart,’ she’d shouted at Dad, in another row.

The wings were still whispering tissue against my hand. I took the sharpest knife from drawer, the one Mom said I was not allowed to use and sliced from the softness under his beak to between his tiny legs. There was blood; not lots but when I put my fingers in and opened him out, I could see his heart beat, once, twice and then I watched it stop.