
Gaylord Brewer

APOLOGIA FOR BIRDING

And to you, Miss O'Shaughnessy, adieu. I leave
you the rara avis on the table as a little momento.

— Caspar Gutman, *The Maltese Falcon*

We include this epigraph as modest buffer
of “cool” against our hero’s humbling epiphany —
he’s a bird geek. Look at him, dripping between
banana trees, mashing trails of gooey mango
where butterflies dance drunk when sky’s clear.
Right now it’s pouring. How did this happen?
There he perches, drenched, absurd in the terrain,
taking a muddied hill through steamed lenses
of field glasses. Focus? Where a squirrel cuckoo
just disappeared into thick second-growth.
The bird’s not a fool; it’s raining. Look at this clown,
wanting to glimpse the last wildness — why,
he can’t even bring himself to use “I” in such a big,
slippery landscape. 3000 feet. You’d think
he’d unearthed his own Macchu Picchu up here.
Look at him grinning, at the bulge of strange apples
in a knapsack. Where is everybody, anyway?
Dry in their rooms, bud, with a book and mug.
In cuckoo land, rain thins. The bird looses
a sharp *kip! wheeu!* And hops into sight. It preens
wings back to their rufous luster, long white-tipped
rectrices to full and airy distinction. It leaps
to descending glide and goofy man pursues,
lurching in sludge and rot and heavy tropical grass.
What beauty! 20 inches if one. God — the nest!
Now this is a language a geek can live with.

