A Bird of Prey
by Jim Grimsley

The Play: A modern tragedy set in a large city in California where the young people face good and evil on their own terms, with calamitous consequences. When Monty's dysfunctional family moves to a complex urban environment from rural Louisiana, Monty attempts to find genuine faith, while at the same time struggling to shield his younger siblings from the temptation and danger they encounter everywhere.

Time and Place: The 1990s. An Unnamed City.

The Scene: A local boy, Corvette, has been missing for a few days. No one knows where he is or what happened, although speculation amongst his contemporaries is wild, especially from Donna, who is a close friend of Corvette and who feels she knows more than the others. In the first speech, Donna shares her innermost fears.

DONNA: It's me now. I'm the one. I have to hurry because Hilda and Tracey are coming soon, but I'm here. I guess I'm praying you know? I don't guess anybody's there but I'm talking to somebody. We need help. (Pause.) You know who I mean. All of us. (Pause.) I feel like I really am talking to somebody, like somebody really is there. You know? Do you get that feeling sometimes? That you're speaking in a room where you're absolutely alone except there is somebody with you, invisible. Who hears everything you say. I wish that were true. (Pause.) I know things nobody else knows. (Pause.) I kept watching Corvette those last few days. I talked to him. I know he's dead now, I know he didn't just run away, and I keep thinking about that last conversation. I talked to him and he seemed like he was burning up with something. He had met somebody.

He talked about this man. Just for a minute. This older guy. And when he did his eyes, they were like, I don't know. Like prey. Like he was watching something swoop down on him, and he wanted it. He wasn't scared, but he was hooked on something, not a drug but something else, a feeling. He wouldn't say much, and then he tried to act normal again, and when I asked him a question about this man he just laughed. But I was so scared, because of the look in his eyes. Like he would be killed in the next second and he wanted it. And right then I wondered what his life had been like, to make him feel like that. He had lived on my street forever, he was my neighbor since he was a kid, and all of a sudden I felt like I hardly knew him. And he went away with Thacker and I never saw him again. But when I heard he had disappeared, I knew. (Pause.) I never told anybody I talked to him. When I close my eyes I can still see the look on his face. (Pause.) It's the way Monty looks, sometimes. Like there's somebody waiting for him, too. (Pause.) I know he talks to somebody, when he's alone, I know he's not embarrassed to call it praying, like I am. But he needs it. Somebody's got to help him, if he's going to escape. Somebody.

The Scene: Monty's young sister, Marie (thirteen), struggles with the torment of a fractured and abusive family life. In a moment alone, on her way home from school, Marie confesses her need for the protection and fullness of school life.

MARIE: I'm going home, I'm walking behind Monty and Evan, and I'm being quiet so Evan won't punch me in the shoulder, I'm going home like I'm supposed to, but I don't want to go. All day in school it's been peaceful, with nobody bothering me, except Marie in my math class who hates that we have
the same name. Except for her they leave me alone, and I like that. All day I sit there with my books and do what I'm supposed to do. Everything is calm all day. But school doesn't last long enough, I have to go home at the end of every day, and when the bell rings I get all hollow inside, and I pack up my books and go outside to wait for Monty and Evan. We walk home the long way, we go pretty slow, and we never talk, unless we're arguing about something. We're all thinking the same thing, we're all wondering what it will be like when we get home, and I hate that feeling, I hate not knowing. I wish it would be peaceful, I think about it the whole way home, and sometimes it is. Sometimes Mama comes to walk us home instead of Monty, and I can tell by the way she looks whether it's okay at home or not. If she's smiling and she's brushed her hair and if she looks me in the eye, then everything's all right. But if she's standing there with her arms all wrapped around herself and her hair pulled back and she's looking at the ground, I know it's not okay, I know they're fighting again. I don't want to go home then, more than anything. But I don't have any choice. I wish school lasted longer. Sometimes I wish it lasted so long I would have to spend the night. I told that to my friend Candy, we have most of our classes together, and she likes me; I told her I wish I could stay in school all the time, but she didn't understand. She says I need a boyfriend, that's all I need, but I think about my dad and I don't know if I want one or not.