

# The Eagle

Andrew Lafleche

Laura sat beneath the near bare birch tree. She sat beneath the tree and stewed. Across the yard, the boys were carrying-on in their tree fort. The tree fort dad had built for Alex the previous summer. The tree fort which explicitly expressed in bright red spray paint, No Girls Aloud.

Laura kicked at the leaves she'd raked into a pile. "It's *allowed*, stupid," she cursed.

Of course, stupid wasn't really a curse word, but if mother ever heard her use it, Laura would have earned a smack. Girls do not use words like *stupid*. And they don't spit.

Laura growled her throat, sucked all her saliva onto the base of her tongue, and hawked a loogie.

The slimy string hung from her lip and threatened to soak her flannel button-down. She huffed. "Girls don't spit," she whined, wiping the failed spittle from her chin. "Girls don't swear. Girls don't play in the mud. Girl's can't go in the tree fort. Girls can't, can't, can't."

She pressed her back into the sturdy tree trunk and glared at the tree fort. The leaves on the maple were orange. Orange is ugly on trees, which is why birch trees always look prettier than maple trees in the fall. Their leaves only turn yellow before descending to the ground. Green and yellow are palatable. Orange and green, however, should never be seen *except for in the washing machine*.

Laura's mother's voice, again. Laura's mother's voice, always.

She looked up. Above the reaching branches, the gray clouds threatened snow. But that's it. Halloween would come first—then the snow.

An eagle soared into view, wings still, effortless. Before Laura could completely appreciate the majestic creature, six little birds darted toward it. Their violent wings, if not in the sky and instead were flapping on the surface of a lake, would have looked like drowning.

The eagle glanced at its aggressors, pressed gently into the air beneath its extended wings, and gracefully ascended higher, annoyed or saddened, it was hard to tell from where Laura sat.

"Stupid birds, stupid boys, stupid mom. Girls can't go in the tree fort because girls don't climb trees." Laura punched the ground, not hard, but enough to show that she meant business. "I can climb trees."

The lowest branch towered one jump out of reach. Laura stared at it, focussed, bent her knees and jumped with all her might.

To her surprise, her hands reached past the branch. She could have kissed the crisp whiteness she jumped so high. Quickly, she reached an arm around and clung to the branch. Laura swung her hips and managed to get a foot over the crux. She wiggled, and pulled, and grunted, and groaned, and in the struggle righted herself on the lowest branch, base camp for her climb.

“I don’t need your stupid tree or your fort!” She yelled across the yard.

The boy’s carrying-on quieted. Alex peaked out the curtain-clad window.

Mac’s head popped out beside his.

“Laura,” Alex whined. He was at the age where no matter how serious he wanted to sound, his voice was always the octave of whining. “Laura,” he whined again, “get down from there before you hurt yourself.”

Laura stuck out her tongue, a twelve-year-old’s middle finger.

“I’m telling mom,” Alex said, whining.

A few feet away hung another sturdy limb. She bounded for it.

Branch by branch she scaled the tree until she was as high as the boys were.

“You’re too high, Laura,” Alex said, concerned, but still whiny.

Laura grinned. “You’re just jeal-ous,” she called in a sing-song voice.

Alex started again, but it was no use. Laura had continued her climb and by all appearances, didn’t look like she was going to stop until she reached the top.

The boys hurried down the ladder. From the ground, Laura almost couldn’t be seen she was so high. Laura was higher than the house.

“Laura! You come down, right now!” Alex demanded.

The patio door slid open. Alex and Laura’s mother’s head poked through the opening.

“What’s going on out here?” she barked. “You’re terrorizing the whole neighborhood with your yelling.” She looked to the pile of leaves where Laura had been raking. Obviously, Laura wasn’t there.

Alex was about to explain everything when Laura called from her perch at the top of the tree.

“I thought you said girls couldn’t climb trees!” She yelled down, gloating.

Alex added, “I tried to get her to stop but she—”

“Laura Jessica Parker!” her mother yelled. “You come down from there right now.”

Laura rolled her eyes. She mouthed *you come down from there right now*.

“I can see you sticking out your tongue, young lady!”

Laura sighed.

She looked around. She looked down. Her mother and brother and Mac looked ridiculous, miniature, yelling up at her. They looked fake, like she was in the rafters looking down at the characters and the set of a school play. The backyard looked smaller. The roof looked flat. Everything that seemed so big from below, now looked remarkably dull.

“If you don’t come down from there this instant—” her mother yelled, but it was too late.

Laura let go what was left of the trunk at the top of the tree. She bent her knees and lunged off the branch into the air, into nothing.

The three miniatures screamed Laura’s name.

Laura, smiling, extended her arms. She understood the eagle.

Author Bio:

Andrew Lafleche is an award-winning poet and author of *No Diplomacy*; *Shameless*; *Ashes*; *A Pardonable Offence*; *One Hundred Little Victories*; *On Writing*; *Merica, Merica on the Wall*; and *After I Turn into Alcohol*. His work uses a spoken style of language to blend social criticism, philosophical reflection, explicit prose, and black comedy.