

**The Bolton Bugle**  
**Birds of a Feather By CW**  
**For Ed. 23.4.04**  
**Word Count 300**

*First of all, this is not a joke. Birds now, as well as bees, are disappearing. When I was a little girl, I used to watch the birds with Zorro masks, hopping from branch to branch of me Ma and Da's old apple tree. There were so many of those half-blue, half-yellow avian acrobats back then. These days, you're lucky if you see one.*

*Secondly-*

I looked up from my column on a paragraph break and saw Nadia Cough sitting down again. Up and down. Up and down. She was hardly ever at her desk, that one. Her short black hair curled up at the edges of her forehead. She wore those narrow European letterbox shaped glasses that screamed, '*Make way, make way. Superior intelligence coming through!*' She was the only other woman in the office with short hair. She hunched forward to change a last minute detail on an advert for a bedding company. Satisfied, she clicked save and close, then leant back and put the last tip of a finger of Kit-Kat into the zero of her mouth. I wouldn't need that many togs on my duvet if – the phone rang...

"Hello, the Bolton Bugle."

"Hello," said a voice as comforting as a Radio Four presenter, "I've seen a bird."

"That's gre-"

"It was eating all the peanuts off the feeder like a don't know what. Cheeky beggar."

The good-humoured voice rolled on. It was cavernous. I couldn't tell if it was a man or a woman. The phone was glued to my ear. The voice pulled me inside the mouthpiece, down the line and out the other side to a time before cars and computers, before language, even. Everything was still. All that could be heard was a low creaking drone, the sound of the Earth opening up at its core. With a twinge of sadness, I realised, the line had gone dead.

Out of the window, grey light dropped slowly to the ground tired from its journey through the clouds. The office was practically empty. People sat on chairs at desks, arms at right angles to their ribs. Blank faces topped bodies thickened by years of biscuit consumption, fingers tapped away at keyboards cabled to beige boxes filled with light. Behind their eyes, the odd good intention wrestled to get out. A poster on a wall under the clock near the exit read: 'Do Not Assume Anything It Makes An Ass of U and Me'. We are all in this together, I thought, and opened up the newspaper.