Inspired by Harris Burdick’s image entitled *Uninvited Guests*

            When Mr. Summerton bought the little blue cottage, he had simply assumed the miniature door with the attached room was for storage.  He had trudged down into his damp, musty basement countless times to try to force the tiny bronze knob to budge, but it never moved.  After two weeks, his efforts to break through the mystery of the minute door ceased.  This was, of course, all before tonight.
            Mr. Summerton woke drenched in sweat, his heart beating wildly, images from a terrifying dream flashed through his mind.  A hideous face lined with patches of matted fur, watery, expressionless eyes, and yellowed, cracked claws longer than daggers and just as lethal were frozen pictures in his mind.  He was gradually regaining control of his breathing until he heard footsteps echoing from the hallway.  Each step drove an icy needle of fear into his heart.  Mr. Summerton removed his covers and shivered despite the warmth of the summer night.  Defenseless except for a dull, rusty letter opener, he crept through the shadowy hallways of his home.  Turning the corner into his kitchen, he glimpsed something from his peripheral vision.  A foot covered in matted brown fur disappeared behind the door leading to his basement.  Mr. Summerton followed hesitantly and opened the chipped door a tiny crack.  Squinting his eyes, he quickly scanned the dark room, stopping at the little wooden door with the bronze knob.  **His heart was pounding.  He was sure he had seen the door knob turn.**

Uninvited Guests

A home away from home

a little getaway for myself

The cottage was my escape

from all things stressful and worldly.

In it, there were no phones, no TV’s, no radios

Nothing to disturb the peace…

nothing I brought anyway.

After an exhausting yet exciting day

of hiking and exploring and mapping and fantasizing,

I fell into a deep sleep on the russet brown recliner.

Sleep, glorious sleep…

Minutes, seconds, hours later,

Waking with a start,

Drenched in sweat,

my heart beat wildly,

Frightening images flashed through my mind.

Did I really see it? No, impossible…

Hideous faces

lined with patches of matted fur,

watery, expressionless eyes, and

yellowed, cracked claws

longer than daggers

were frozen pictures in my mind.

Footsteps echoed down the hallway.

Each step drove an icy needle of fear into my heart.

Defenseless except for a dull, rusty letter opener,

I crept through the shadowy hallways

of my once-safe place.

Opening the chipped door a tiny crack

Squinting my eyes,

I scanned the dark room,

stopping at the little wooden door with the bronze knob.

**My heart was pounding.**

**I know I saw the doorknob turn.**

The Third Floor Bedroom

Once there was a dear sweet girl with a flightless bird heart. And dear girl, your courier pigeon eyes are bigger than your wingspan. After all, keep playing with your feathers and you’ll pluck them all out.

It all began when someone left the window open.

The third floor bedroom was hers all her own. In the winters it was too cold, and in the summers it was too hot. But it was her own. And the entire room was papered with crisp sheets of wallpaper. A handsome grey and blue texture, a pretty arrangement of vines all sloping in the direction of the window, as if they were growing towards the sun. And perched ever so sweetly on the vines, were birds, the color of eggshells, with their wings pointed in midflight, again leaning ever so slightly toward the window as if about to take off into the wind.

The birds came to life. They always did, and she swore of it. At night, when she lay silent, she held her breath and off the walls they came to flutter and make great displays of their flight in the air. The birds landed on the edge of her bed, just within reach of her feet, and though she was delighted with their presence, she never touched the birds. Although she imagined their precious little cooing as she stroked their soft delicate wings, she still never dared to touch the birds.

But like I said, it all began when someone left the window open.

The birds had been her friends for years, and each night their spectacle grew brighter. The open window didn’t even spark her concern. That night, they returned to their midnight perch on the end of her bed. She was fascinated. She was curious. And it was this curiosity that always got the better of her. She sat up, and she touched one of the birds. Its feathers were softer than her touch, yet she realized a moment too late. Suddenly, the birds tore themselves from all the perches of her bedroom and they made for the window. In great flocks the hundreds of birds passed through the open pane. She was startled and afraid. Her precious birds! Hadn’t she always been faithful to them? Hadn’t she made sure not to be a disturbance? Why should they leave her like this?

In a frantic swift move, the girl sprung up and in her bare feet, raced the short steps to the window from the bed, her bird’s midnight perch. The eggshell birds crowded the air, and in the mass scurry of feathers flying she couldn’t make out which way to go. The birds were escaping. But she made it to the window, and with such ferocity, slammed it shut just as the last bird was about to pass. The final, pretty bird hit the window with such force it knocked itself out, sprawling to the wood floor. She wanted to lean down to examine the mass of feathers and wings, and it was twitching ever so softly, as if it meant to simply get up and fly. But she didn’t dare touch it. Instead, she carefully opened the window once again, as if to repent for her mistake. As she did so, a great white moving cloud, sputtering and squawking, curved across the sky, aiming for the window. The birds from the paper returned to peck out the girl’s eyes, to clip her skin, to terrorize her for her curiosity. Motionless, she lay on the floor of the third-floor bedroom, in such a pretty, bird heap.

If only someone had not left the window open.