

## Sebastian

By Robert Aquino Dollesin

It was my fourteen-year-old brother, Sebastian, who discovered the robin's nest. But it was me, who would each morning go outdoors to the clothesline to check the chicks. They were three, featherless with ever-open mouths. Sometimes I'd sit in the shade of the cherry tree and watch the mother robin's head emerge from the post. Then she'd launch herself skyward and the chicks would chirp frantically during those moments of abandonment.

That spring the robins became my passion.

One morning I caught Sebastian standing on a chair with a hand inside the clothesline post.

"If you touch them," I warned, "their mother will refuse to care for them."

Scowling, Sebastian removed his hand and returned to the flowers he grew alongside the fence.

I waited a moment longer before turning to return to the house.

Before I'd slid the screen door open, Sebastian asked, "Why do you care about a couple of filthy baby birds, anyway?"

I didn't say anything.

The following morning I came out to see the robin's and found Sebastian -- once again standing on the chair. This time he had snaked a garden hose into the mouth of the post.

"What are you doing?" I shouted.

Sebastian turned his head to face me. He winked. The chicks gushed out the opposite end.

Later, as I packed the dead robins into a shoebox, I caught Sebastian in the corner of my eye approaching.

"Let me help you," he said.

"Don't you dare touch them," I snapped.

While the mother robin perched on a telephone wire above, I buried her babies under a patch of bare earth.

\*\*\*

In the summer of my sixteenth year, when Sebastian was fifteen, he came home one evening carrying two Siamese kittens he had rescued from the SPCA.

"Orphans. Like us," Sebastian said. "Found beneath a porch while their mother lay dead in the street, not twenty feet away."

Twice daily I brought a bowl of warm milk out and watched the mewling kitties slurp it up. When the second bowl of milk was finished, I'd spend the remainder of the afternoon playing with the frisky charcoal-white kittens.

Sebastian, sometimes down on all fours tending his flower garden -- watched me.

Several weeks passed and the kittens were more curious, frequently venturing from the cardboard box I'd fashioned into a makeshift pen.

Apparently, the two kittens had found their way to Sebastian's garden and had

been caught rooting my brother's zinnia seedlings.

He had bludgeoned them with his rusted shovel, transforming the two kittens into a bloody mass of fur and flesh.

When I came out he tried to explain, "They were destroying my flowers."

Without answering him, I scooped up the limp kittens from Sebastian's flowerbed. "Why?" I begged to know. "Why can't I love anything without you destroying it?"

Sebastian blinked a few times. "Don't forget that I'm the one who found them." He held out his shovel for me to use.

I slapped it out of his hand.

\*\*\*

This morning I made a phone call and a mob of detectives, their guns drawn, stomped through Sebastian's garden, trampling his prized magnolias before storming the little blue house where my brother lived.

I sat watching from my car across the street, crying. The authorities brought in a bulldozer and dug my sister-in-law, Monica, out of a shallow grave beneath Sebastian's bed of blooming roses.

The sight of Sebastian being escorted in cuffs sent all at the same time waves of shame and guilt and relief crashing through me.

Sebastian glanced over the roof of the police cruiser and caught me staring. For a long time we exchanged stares.

Then I started the engine and watched an officer help my brother into the back seat of the cruiser.

He slid across the bench seat and grinned at me out the window, shaking his head knowingly.

*Robert Aquino Dollesin resides in Sacramento, California, where he writes short fiction and poetry during any spare hours he can pinch from his real-life schedule. Among other online venues, Robert Aquino Dollesin's work can be found on: Storyglossia, Ken\*Again, Cynic Online, Pequin, and Bewildering Stories.*