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ACCORDING TO JOHN JAMES Audubon, there was once a species of bird in southeastern Pennsylvania, the Cuvier's kinglet, *Regulus cuvieri*, or, as Audubon liked to call it, Cuvier's wren. And according to Addie and Tom Kavanagh, the mysterious bird may have magically appeared again nearly two hundred years later on a ridge near their home, seventy-five miles north of Audubon's original sighting.

Audubon claimed that he had discovered this "pretty and rare species" on his father-in-law's plantation, Fatland Ford, northwest of Philadelphia, in June of 1812. As was his custom, he shot it in order to draw it, thinking at first it was the more common ruby-crowned kinglet. "I have not seen another since, nor have I been able to learn that this species has been observed by any other individual," he wrote in his famous *Birds of America*.

But Audubon wasn't known for his honesty. He claimed to be the son of a French admiral and a beautiful Spanish Creole woman from the islands, but his father was actually a French merchant, slave dealer, and naval lieutenant, his mother an illiterate French chambermaid. And surely it was a practical move, this naming of a bird (real or not) for Baron Georges Cuvier, the famed French naturalist and one of Audubon's earliest patrons.

Consider, also, the "joke" Audubon played on a naturalist named Constantine Samuel Rafinesque, when Audubon and his wife, Lucy, hosted Rafinesque at their Kentucky home in the summer of 1818. For his

guest Audubon described—and drew—ten species of imaginary fish that he claimed were native to the Ohio River. Rafinesque included accounts of these fish (including something called the “devil-jack diamond fish,” described as between four and ten feet long, weighing up to four hundred pounds, and covered with bulletproof scales) in several articles and eventually a book.

There has been no single sighting of a Cuvier’s kinglet in the two hundred years since Audubon claimed to have shot one. Unless, that is, one believes the Kavanaghs, the bird-artist-and-ornithologist team who published the environmentalist and antiwar classic *A Prosody of Birds*—an odd blend of delicate artist’s plates and dense poetic scansions of bird-songs—in 1969. Actually, only Addie claimed to have spotted the Cuvier’s kinglet, one morning at dawn. It was an overcast morning in May 2001, and she was on a routine excursion into the field, on the ridge above her home along the Nisky Creek, near Burnham, Pennsylvania. Though he wasn’t present at the time, Tom has never disputed his wife’s claim. But, strange as it may seem to question the veracity of a serious scientist and teacher like Tom Kavanagh, there are reasons to doubt both him and Addie.

If what Addie saw that morning was not a Cuvier’s kinglet but a ruby-crowned kinglet—a mistake neither Addie nor Tom would be likely to make—then she had her reasons for such a mysterious lapse. Addie always had her reasons for every outlandish choice she made. And Tom loved her deeply through all of them.

Tom and Addie’s daughter, Scarlet, has always loved birds too, though not with the nearly fanatical passion of her parents. She has loved them enough to write about them, off and on, since she was a child. But now she is less concerned about whether or not the Cuvier’s kinglet suddenly, magically, reappeared in southeastern Pennsylvania than about the instructions her mother presented to her and Tom two weeks ago—for what she wished them to do with her body: clear orders for a brazenly il-

IN HOVERING FLIGHT

legal burial. There is no easy way to handle such a request, as far as Scarlet can see. And it's hard to say what Tom is thinking.