Making Birds

Joni Wallace
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I.

The neighbors pace the floor to a hole in the pine. The physicist cups his ear. For months he has been pulling white birds down in pieces of feather and claw.

He spends the days sewing grey quills to the still bodies, labeling throats with pen. He uses an eyedropper of ink. Beaks are molded and baked in colors.

He is asleep when the eggs, impossible ovals, harden and grow on the inside. He dreams of a plane that hovers in a cloud. He dreams of an eye in a wing.

II.

In the eye of a wing a woman stands with a broom and numbers pinned to her dress:

This one for Our Lady of the Closet. This one for Our Lady of Fatima. This one for your shoe, black and too narrow, the lace in her palm.

He would like to hold her, to take her home, smooth and unleavened,
in his pocket. To feel the poplars bloom slow against his hands.

He does not stop when she follows through the streets. She rides in his car in a seat of hair. She rides above the headlights in globes.

III.

She makes a shadow of her dullness and sculpts her hair against the rain. "Tell me about the birds," she says, hands fluttering, but he hears a hammering slide from her hem and break on the floor where he is scrubbing. He is crawling under the drywall, incessantly. He feels his feet are glass and may break at any moment. Then she would have to carry him, a wooden bride, and stiff. Across every doorstep.