

DAVID WRIGHT
RUNNER-UP

There Is Another Book

Where we are not required

upstairs, where the pages contain
all the world's birds. Not one seems able

to remember, to love,

to fly away. On my porch is a feeder
I cannot fill often enough. How am I

to ask a single question,

to keep up with the neighborhood's endless
hunger—more, more asking me to give.

to examine our stupid animal or metaphysical hearts.

Every speck and seed I sweep
into my birdshit covered hands, I resent.

So we do with it whatever we like:

I want to shoot mourning doves while they coo every
morning, with a camera, a slingshot,

fill the margins with notes or nothing;

name all the squirrels after my girlfriends
from grade school, open my throat,

forget invisible souls, our empty pockets; open

my mouth: "Ann MacDonald—I still
want to feed you from my hands" shouted from

our questionable windows and doors,

on high. Tree branches it would kill me now to climb.
I am instead dog-earing my favorite birds, deciding to

wear certain pages like hats and
tell all of this craziness only to you. One professor
told me years ago that my poems tried too hard

on Sundays to worship, then sing
to make the world believe in an old God. He and I were
not wrong. Look at all the things I've said already,
the words on page 87, forgettable
believing that you needed to hear them. I'm sorry
I didn't dance to your playlists, all those incidental
tunes making our tongues grow tired;
blues and laments and secular prayers and genius
that could never quite be the sky. One day after we

translate every other word into Latin and
become ourselves I will remember your names. I'll ask
you to click on that new app that changes us
back again into intricate sketches. So give
into silhouettes of feathers, doves lighting
in afternoon sun on carpets and chairs. I am reaching

up. So be done trying to teach anyone
the point where everything becomes a moment
of being a body, a woman, a man, a greedy sparrow,

anything. Maybe someone else will be
fragile and tensile and just outside of language.
And perhaps there is no one to blame, no one but us

responsible now. Though it's probably us,
on a Tuesday evening, in May, with our raised glasses
of champagne who return soon enough to

our own rooms full of shelves, our windows
a memory of the first time we opened the book
we'd stolen from a grown person's shelf,

flickering with feathered light, our lips stained by wild berries,

filling the jars of our hearts with forbidden
and imperfect things. I could believe in a
wilderness;

a throat coursing with pleasure, naive and sweet.

Hell, I did. I do. Then I sit on an Illinois hill,
nerves pulsing,
and, not needing to, I open another book of
dark scratches.

I swear. I expect nothing.

Then something sacred lights on the page, rises
in my eye,
a trace, slight shadow of a wing.