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Ornithology #1

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JENNIFER SCHALLIOL

Ornithology #1

Are birds every spring half-starved?
Is hunger just the seasonal
usual to them, the norm:

you go on down to Florida
or thereabouts, you get the sign,
the signal, and off you go

back to Ohio, Illinois,
Wisconsin, and oops,
it's actually still snowing,

the ground is frozen, and worms -- well,
they're a ways off yet -
so is this just the typical?

Is there a reason why they don't
lollygag in the South longer?
Maybe people feed them too much

like the pigeons at Navy Pier,
incapacitated solely
via instinct, and provision,

so these vacationing Yank birds,
I suppose they suspect they'll grow
fat and unable to fly, so

off back here they come
to starve,
to survive.

Still Life with Twister

A six-mile swath – must it always
be a swath? A scythe. Arbitrary.
Picture an unwound scroll,
twisted over itself here and there,
dangling to an end somewhere
x minutes later on a road map.

County names in black, generic
font, slight sheen, and back-

ground of that watercolor
yellow.

Sharpen the focus to splinters
of trees
of sides
of houses snapped in half,
garages sliced cleanly and removed,
shingles sliding neatly down,
the furniture within standing
still poised, tea-time get-up,
untouched look.
circling,

(National Guard in camouflage, Red Cross vans

the floor, a goldenrod linoleum,
now white, covered in this sheer
dust – from where?

handing out Ford-donated gloves for our
Tasks Ahead, doughnuts and coffee
and Gatorade in the mornings,
salad and spaghetti and bread at noon,
a man in boots who stomped through each
now-borderless yard to tell us to come eat)

clumps of pet fur float listlessly over
too, sucked from beneath
the fridge and oven
still

(three mornings after now and State Farm

hasn't shown)

the digital is out.
it is No Time.
the air is duller
and fluctuates less
about the ears.
there are little boys' toys
in our yard that my mother
can't wash and give to her
granddaughter,
trees,
she jokes, crying minutes
before
yuk...)

(plus innumerable scraps of roof, drywall (now
wet and crumbled), insulation, bird's eggs, pale
wash of blue, brown speckled under caked debris,
next to the stumps, under halved pine

(seven of the eight trees down in back, counting rings:
32 years old. "same age as you, Mom!" yuk

and after
too, trees impaling
debris,
the neighbors' house,
quiet.
(where the twins we babysat
used to live),
garages and kitchens
entirely absent.

(morning to afternoons spent picking up this

robins sitting on the stumps,

eggs next to stumps, under halved trees,
by the former-fence rubble, in the middle
of the yard.

most absent: all
the trees.

"I found a bird wing!"

"Oh...

I found a whole bird."

My sister instructing me to put the eggs by the
upside-down nest under the standing pine. She'll bury them later

—

only don't turn the nest over.

The male starling sitting all day in the apple tree
under which we had found his mate that morning
(he sat there the next two days, too)

And the landscape, the silhouette is so changed
I don't recognize the photos taken in our backyard, of my niece,
when my mother shows them to me now,
and every time we drive home I forget to retrain my eyes
until I see the treeline go.

Jennifer Schalliol is currently pursuing an MFA in Writing at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She has had poems accepted in the journals *Salt* and *Ink*. She recently published a chapbook, *Means of Access*, through the Kenyon Review Chapbook Series, and is working on her first book.