Ornithology #1

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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. (National Guard in camouflage, Red Cross vans

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)

circling,

the floor, a goldenrod linoleum,

now white, covered in this sheer
dust – from where?

clumps of pet fur float listlessly over

too, sucked from beneath

the fridge and oven

still

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…)

and after

too, trees impaling
debris,

the neighbors’ house,

quiet.

(where the twins we babysat

used to live),

garages and kitchens

entirely absent.

“arid found a bird wing!”

“Oh…

I found a whole bird.”

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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.