

MARIANNE BORUCH

## THE PIGEONS

Are they pigeons? Fifth floor, other side of  
this giant window I know by heart their  
comings/goings, their stayings-put on the sill.  
Down there the river with its ice.  
With its snow *on* ice.

Of course it's always the end of time these days.  
Birds larger, winter's layer of air  
between skin and feathers, that warm puff-up,  
the official *WhileYouWaitForSpringDoThisToLiveFriend*.

It's snowing. Four birds hunched over like  
drunks out there. How far from me? I'd show you—this far!—  
holding my hands apart. See? (I think not! my aunt  
Never-Thinking-Anything-But-Not

used to say just to be saying, her mouth a knife  
cutting butter from the freezer.) For sure they  
aren't starlings. Or crows. I put my hand on the bird book,  
swear to god a pigeon is mere pigeon, no matter

who says what. Names change nothing.  
Snow coming harder now. One goes to war like that—  
the snow, the nothing-changes.  
I hear them, see them, heads a-bob really crazy.

Not the same-old-same-old crazy, iridescence dimming  
in the shit-show of snowfall dive-bombing every side.  
The birds move closer to the window, to each other.  
Grunts, gurgles, a mangled sound an ornithologist told me

equals stress (outside) and *dis*-tress (inside),  
two nightmares joined in the heads they keep bent  
and arcing, turning almost full circle like  
that movie years ago with the blond scary girl inside.

Okay, well. I can change certain things by imagining  
certain things. What's in me is of the very first *pathetic*,  
somewhere between Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon,  
a wishful leaping ahead for these birds to

tomorrow's maybe no snow, maybe sun forcing  
skeleton trees to the ground as shadow,  
a single dark line only a wise unthinking pencil  
gets down on paper.

What's solace in this era but a little  
scratch & sniff. Still part-human I can  
scrape out hope anywhere.

# SHAME

that I took its picture, the owl sprawled  
the paved trail, the ravine deep down primeval.  
Or so any woods  
backstories that ache in me ancient.

I've watched owls in trees motionless,  
hungry-alert for prey. As if I could stop breathing too.  
Once my binoculars: no, just a diseased burl  
on an elm—until a feather shifted in wind.

Now this, one of  
the great ones,

its huge head  
god-like, flat-out on the asphalt trail  
aimed at  
anyone walking by. Not the best place to die,  
wide-eyed.

*Surprised,*

we'd humanly claim  
as if all ending is accidental, a timeline's  
out of the blue *okay, that's it.*

And cheers? Terrified wrens, I bet, burst out  
of hiding at this death, or fear in every mouse  
like rain's H<sub>2</sub>O released to air.  
Saved! Also those tiny blind-oblivious vireo chicks  
in a nest mirrored  
in that owl's eye

above the stream cutting ravine out of glacier rock,  
eleven thousand years back,  
and still—

Shame, a new definition all the way down.

Because town, city, rivers turning to sludge  
leave strips of trees on shore as  
party favors, mementoes, a fate, a relic.

That owl fallen to  
a gorgeous quiet twice, my  
up-trail, then back, the photo clicked  
before coyotes carried it to pups in a den for supper  
or "Sanitation" shoveled it  
into truck bed and myth,

big talk at a cigarette break, or some writer  
remembered its detail  
to buoy up a poem's broken headlights.

What is it in that owl  
I met before, pre-Ice Age.

What about *Hello Milkiness*  
in the first cell we shared, *Hello Microscopic*  
*Eye-to-Eye of*  
*Present into Future* there.

I did not *sorry sorry* to the owl, never  
*of course I remember*,  
and in our solitude  
immense and damning

not once *you are beautiful*.