

## Patrick Whitfill

### *The Sparrow*

It was nothing shocking,  
the way it fit into my hand,  
snug. But I wanted to name it  
beyond the stiff feathers  
and the distilled eyes.

Ashley tells me to wash  
my hands before I sit  
down to dinner, that disease  
loves the dying, and I guess  
that makes sense, that it fits  
with some universal law

that the only thing I'll ever get  
from a bird will be a disease,  
some contagion the doctor  
at the clinic will have to look up  
in his fat, black medical book.

I don't wash my hands  
and Ashley complains  
that I spend too much time  
on what I find in gutters.

I bury the sparrow  
along the spine of an oak,  
say a few words to the sky  
about giving and taking  
things that aren't mine.

With my fingers, I dig its grave.  
I have no ritual, no concept  
of finishing, only a few words  
that make the most sense:  
words about dust. About ash.

Ashley's going to bed and doesn't  
want to deal with me tonight.  
I tell her things die in gutters.  
I tell her stars have a lifespan.  
I tell her light and death both  
travel and when we see them

we're seeing the past  
and that *that* matters. She says  
she didn't marry into poultry  
and that tomorrow one  
of the cats will uncover  
my little sacrament and leave it

at the front door as a present  
for the family. But maybe  
that's what I want to see:  
the sparrow stiff as the concrete  
beneath it, blind and clawed  
down past the red.

Because that's what I see  
when I say *Present*: something  
done with the bleeding.  
Something that goes  
in a burst, fast as flight,  
but leaves a few feathers.  
Kicks up a bit of dust.

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**Patrick Whitfill** lives and writes in Texas. His poetry appears or is forthcoming in the *Mid-American Review*, *Briar Cliff Review* and *Concho River Review*.