

KERRIN MCCADDEN

Passerines

I want to tell you about the thud against the back door,
that my man says, “bird.” That later we see its tail
sticking out from underneath the siding. That its
tail feathers shine like oil, shifting purple to blue,
and we are kneeling on the wet decking. The yellow
of its stomach making it something more
than the brown birds everywhere, a tiny prize
for kneeling there, for prying back the vinyl siding
to find a yellow-bellied flycatcher, its cheek bloodied.
I want to tell you how he held it, said “Passerine”
before it took flight. Little Passerine. Songbird.
Before she left, I brought my daughter to Saint-Jeanet.
There were swallows like boomerangs near dark,
like here, like everywhere I go. I want to tell you
about the neighbor, the scientist, who said they were
swifts, not swallows. Swallows are Passerines,
but swifts are not. *Passerine*, I thought, *Passerine*—
a more future verb tense for *to pass*, a tense I can’t
know yet—a passing I can’t understand. The order
Passerine is a mess, the scientist said. It’s impossible
to track its evolution. I want to tell you I don’t understand
evolution, any of it, even mine, becoming the mother
I will be next, the one who lets go. Once, I stood
on a bridge and a man taught me to call sparrows to eat
from my hands, told me he was a sinner, that what he did for me
was atonement, which is a thing I might understand.
I want to tell you there is nothing like their tiny grip,
the way they quiver while they peck at your palm,
wanting to fly out of reach. I want to tell you what happened
when I let her go, but I don’t understand it yet. I want
to talk about this morning, the little yellow bird in sudden,
dizzy flight. The trees full of yellow. How I lost sight.