

Yellow Throat

Tule Lake, 1944

This discarded fence-post piece will become
a bird. Out of all of Audubon's dogeared pages
she chooses the common yellowthroat,
wonders at a golden voice, a warbler.
Black stripe across the eyes
for its nickname of the yellow bandit.

She remembers a Shakespearean
mother as a wren. She remembers, too,
the son before his throat is cut. Before this,
he promises to survive. The mother asks,

“And what will you do now? How will you live?”

And he says, “As birds do, mother.”

“What, with worms and flies?”

“With what I get, I mean; and so do they.”

The mother leaves this scene
screaming. In the next one,
she's already dead.

Both mothers wonder
what lives they held before they gave
life to everything after. Does this statuette
remember being a fence? Does the bird
remember the egg? The first lesson that safety, too,
is fragile? Why yellow and not gold?

Sunset bandit. Buttercup thief.

Now the yellowthroat remembers
being a tree. She remembers freedom
the same way. Michelangelo is said to have
seen angels in marble.

His work was merely
to set them free. In eighty years, her grand-
daughter will retire and watch these
from her sunny backyard deck, will have
a husband to install a heated birdbath
for the winter, to keep the birds coming.

To continue the show, unseasonably.

For now, she uses a pocket knife
to take long curls, and saves them
for firestarting, creates tinder, too,
just in case, to burn all
she cannot scream.