

Swift · *Mary Swander*

Now it is loose in the room, ashes falling  
from its wings, falling from the ceiling,  
the large black flakes, the large black  
wings pressed against the cold window glass,  
my grandmother waving a long yellow broom.

Now it comes down again and again,  
moves inside the pipes of the house, flutters,  
knocks, pounds, the water rising around it,  
its head down, body bent down, mouth open,  
now closed, trailing a long streamer of paper.

Now there are twenty, thirty piled by the chimney.  
I lie down and they come out of my skin,  
cover me completely. I pick them up and they  
dissolve in my hands—feather and bone, a splinter,  
one thin wafer the size of the moon filling the room.

Then they are gone. December, my grandmother  
and I sit before the fire and drink tea.  
She smooths the napkin over her thigh,  
rattles her saucer, brings the cup to her lips.  
*This is lovely*, I say, *lovely*, a huge white bird in my arms.