

GUIDE

*With spring there came that sense of clarity
we'd missed all through the rainy months, although
the somnolescent clouds still held their ground;
the change was slow and what we felt was less
the promise of enameled days or that
love's blade might strike the jetting vein again
as that the bulk of days had shifted in a new
direction, away from us, as the sky thinned.*

In March I heard Louise in her office
above the Visitors' Center haranguing
her Forestry contact about the lack
of useful information on their website;
then, descending from the flight cage, I found
four deer legs the funny State Troopers left
propped at a standstill in the gauzy mist
as if they had outrun their animal.

167

A cold wisp licked the back of my neck as I
considered how the bureaucracy that owns
our birds from molt to tail feather compensates
for the lack of any central intelligence
with a kind of wit barbed with malevolence.
I wrapped the roadkilled legs in plastic bags
and buried them deep in the outdoor freezer.
It was like that: the vibrant image, the aftermath.

Days spent crawling under shrieking kestrels
to scrub out their whitewashed black plastic tub
or in a crabbed dance with our Ferruginous Hawk
scrunching away on his Astroturf-covered perch,
keeping as much distance as his small cell
allowed between us as if by mutual

ANDREW FELD

agreement—although our only *mutual*
is the tethering hunger we use to bind our birds

to us and overcome their deep rooted
abhorrence of the human face, *dreadful*
to her as to all other animals.

Always, *the face of man is the lion's face.*
As our almost-eagle stretched out a wing
like a broken comb, I felt again the shame
of an instinctive reaction to the power-
lessness of love rebounding on its object.

Outside the rotting salmon dumpster-stink
which seemed to issue from our Osprey's wound
and filled her cage, or where our Turkey Vulture
Lethe pecked at the exposed veins that are
my bootlaces, the spring flowers bloomed out
a counterpoint, white petals of Trillium
echoing the green, Star-Flowered Solomon's Seal,
Indian Plum and the Red-Flowering Current.

You know how any practiced speech becomes
theatrical?—so the rote recitals of
my guide talk turned my voice into a stranger's
leading you through the small cell of my self-
consciousness, a voice at odds with its subject,
ingratiating, *false*; and these cages
only numbered and labeled boxes in
the warehouse where they're storing the disaster.

Then the little difference between the dead
bird in my hand and the one with a yellow eye
aimed at my handful of quail narrowed to nothing
and I became elegy's functionary.

*Brown-veined petals of the Yellow Wood Violet,
deep rose flowers of the Salmonberry,
Star-Flowered Solomon's Seal, Indian Plum,
Red-Flowering Current and Western Trillium.*

Here is my day: a drawer of mice I shake
to keep excessive life from spilling out
then slide in the asphyxiating oven.

The resigned feet entering the beak, the tail
curlicuing into a question mark, as if
still curious of what it entered into.
An owl with one eye cataracted blind,
the other bright with purpose, focused beyond,

to where the netted shadows of the State
Forest fall on the bright borders of our
groomed lawns and trails. At my shift's end the sky
also locks down, and in the old-growth trees
surrounding us a wooing, hooing voice
evades its source as we listen, trying
to draw shades of meaning between the call
and its corresponding, captive answer.

169

*We like to think they call each other out
of love, which we find sweet; what weirds us out
is not the Great Horned male moving inside
the light-excluding heights just outside our
borders, his voice always one flight removed
from the still-trembling throat we feel as ours,
become the body of his audience,
or how it brings our half-blind female awake*

*to the extreme of her confinement, clambering up
the chicken wire; but how they start calling*

too late too late to each other before
it's registered on us as dark, and I'm
still busy with my tasks, so much, this late
impossible to finish, down on my knees
with a handful of pellets grained with mice teeth
and vertebrae, smaller and finer than life.