

Someone Else's Offspring

by Jane Olmsted

At night I hear the fluttering of the bird,
 some starling's darling trapped
 after the gables were repaired last week.
 The wings rap at the wire mesh
 and then begin their whispering.

I crawl out my window,
 climb up to the neighbor's balcony
 (who are traveling in some godforsaken place)
 then shimmy up the brownstone
 and flash a light into the quiet darkness
 behind the silver grille.

I want to free the tyke but the landlord refuses
 to answer the phone,
 and all day long the ventilator fan pulls
 feathers and dust and slivers of insulation
 and shoots them into the dew-starved air . . .

Teeth gripping the screwdriver I have for repairs
 and inserting batteries into your childhood toys,
 I make a second trip, knees hugging and sinews twisting
 as my hand reaches beyond what's natural
 and unhinges a corner of the wire cover.

The hole admits my fingertips—
 like creatures that have crossed the line into abomination
 they writhe at the edge of the starling's night.
 I cough up the bit of lettuce, rice patty, raw ground beef
 I've been carrying under my tongue and glue it
 to the screwdriver's flat edge,

then pierce the cross-hairs with a stab
 and leave it, along with *something* more substantial,
 some *words* to get the poor fellow through the night.

I grip the wall. I chirp.