

Her father wore his underwear
where it belonged,
elastic tight across a protruding belly
hard like a birth, or a tumour,
loose about his thinning legs,
from which she averted her eyes.
It was not the dying she minded so much.
It was being held witness to the slide.

(Even now she is deaf
to her hopeful son,
and the baby starling fallen far
from its nest:
each miraculous pin feather
on the immaculate wing
exquisite in destruction,
held out to her awkwardly like a shy hand.

She refuses to nourish a lie
cannot fabricate even four hours
of fairy tale until nightfall
but is compelled to immediately locate
a paper grocery bag
in which the terrified bird
rattles like a handful of dry leaves.
She must start the car despite her son's small,
firm grip on her arm,
close the bag's open end with a fist
over the exhaust pipe
and it is not for her son's comfort
she says:
"It is better this way.")

Her husband, on the other hand,
will often wear underwear on his head
for comic effect.

But she sees his belly swelling
and knows where her men deposit
their rage,
so they may walk through a room
and not shatter everything
every day.

And she will not be witness again.
She will not bear witness again.