

NO EXPLOSION

Gillian Kiley

No explosion,

no grapeshot dappling and piecing the body,
but a small, intact bullet with a hard tip, piercing off center,
away from the vitals but draining nonetheless.

And not dead weight, but an unfurling.
Falling and circling. Flight taken
from the bird, a squab,

and reimposed. In that moment
of touch the bird riveted to the air, the wing stymied, hanging,
onlookers thinking "this will happen forever."

Then one wing working the air,
at first, and then simply
held out, an axle, wand for a spool of thread.

Had it missed, the bullet
would not simply
be that of a poor shot,

it would be penetrating,
toward something, toward higher
air.

Something must fall.
The gull did. The bullet
came with it.

No deposit of innards, no clatter
of beak and claw on asphalt
which later causes a sickness.

Child draws chalk across tar, jumps from left to right or forward
and back, in a game, or draws circles, or her own name, or a face.
The infant sibling puts this chalk in its mouth—

and there it is, disease,
a baby in the trenches, gums going black,
stool some terrible color.

And no residue in the air:
no vivid scent, no invisible, airborne swill, no evensong
led by the churchwarden

with mystical leanings,
no panic,
no extra tenderness

between husband and wife, between the old people
who sit on the bench by the lake
and always bring crusts, nothing

to make the wayward husband more faithful, or more likely
to hold the girlfriend, steadily,
after he is done with her.

Just a falling off,
a falling out of the sky, just an end put to.
An uneven breathing, a feed for the dogs,
a hand lingering on a pan of warm bread.