Swift

Mary Swander

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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 smoothes 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.