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Augury

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AUGURY

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That hanging bird in the maple tree: someone might come and cut it down. Or it might stay and dissolve to bone, blowing through seasons, snared in a mess of fishing line. It must have happened just days ago; the bright body's still heavy and pulls the line tight. If taken down, the absence would mean: another's discomfort. And the open space made open again: a measure of someone's breaking point—*couldn't take it and had enough*. Which is very close to what I feel, rounding the bend down by the lake, finding the goldfinch invisibly strung. Caught plunging *up*, as goldfinches will, bobbing and looping in jittery arcs when alive. How a very wrong thing inverts the world's laws, shows a stilled thing in flight, suggests air can hold weight. How weirdly suggestive is hanging and swaying: *this should be fruit*, the form's ends are tapered, the center's a swell of vesicles, ripening. Wind should make of it *windfall* soon. But the coming upon, the space called *come-upon*, with its soft breeze and footpath, torches the idea of harvest, of gleanings. And "taking a walk" detonates. A bird pinned in air is a measure of wrongness. Walking can't counter it. Redirecting attention towards kids won't erase it. Even if moving quickly past—no progress instills; the sight can't be siphoned from the scene. The bird's presence impinges, like bait.

But yellow gets to be glorious, too. And its brightness not wholly awful. Such a yellow scours sight, fattens it. It is uncorruptedly lemon-like. And the sharp bolt of black on the wing shines like a whip of licorice, slate in rain, a carapace. At the end of the path and around the bend, here's the coming-upon again. The moment itself doesn't close down. Its brightness is not a slamming door, a hinge that squeaks. It isn't irritable. It isn't reaching after facts. Yellow's not trying to *make up for* the end.

Time crests there.

The weather patterns. Fish in the lake. Dogs by the shore with laughing kids. Rasping leaves.

Why must a last moment be made so visible? And held aloft! Why must it dangle, and shift so softly, and keep on making a finality? From it, light rises. On it light settles. Slippery as tallow. Shushing in breeze.

I think it's good to stand beneath a thing that means to take words away. It's good to be in a place where thought can't form the usual way, and famil-

iar scenes—a bird-in-a-tree—get overturned. Dissembled. Made into a precarity. Looked at one way: cornucopic. Tilted another, the scene's sepulchral. How close those can be.

Someone might come and cut the bird down. Or I will, tomorrow.

And after the bird's gone, what would be there, as I come through the trees and around the bend—what, besides shots of memory? An arch of branches over the lake? A green frame around a spot of blue sky, rowboats in a fringe of rushes, the cattails and milkweed about to burst—and past the tangle, just the lake again?

Once, that spot worked like a bower. I liked to walk there and pause at the turn, and enter it, and feel contained. Then, into the bower rained a bird. Dropped a bird. Now swings a bird. Hangs a bird. Yellow shines and yellow ripens. Radiates. Escalates. Somewhere are sparrows in a field, seen and tended, tenderly noted, *watched over* the story goes, and counted, even as they fall. But come stand in this clearing, late afternoon, the still lake fuzzed with gnats in the shade, the oak's heavy green branch overhead, and lean just so. Center the goldfinch in the frame, squint a little, hold in sight—a planet, flecklet, blot on sun.

A ripe pear, a portent, an airless balloon.

Thing whose falling was noted, was seen, whose end was tallied (by the hand of, if you believe).

Occasion for wondering what it feels like to believe.