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Half the Birds in the City

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Half the Birds in the City

(1)

I don't want to die yet,
my brother says one night
like the room will cave in on him.
He's seven and scared
of the half-blind gardener
who fumbles mornings amidst
the house-palms and orchids,
who sleeps afternoons
on the living room couch,
boots hung off the edge.
Galen's convinced
that when the man dies,
it will be soon and in the ivy
by the front door, through really
it is years from now
and in his own bed
with roses nearby.
Neither my brother nor I
know that he will leave behind
paintings he's done,
some of them of us.

Down Green Hill

(2)

In the park I point out pigeons
to my brother and tell him about
a building I once saw torn down
in New York, how pigeons
swarmed up and out of it,
hundreds of them,
maybe half the birds in the city.
Galen thinks it means the park
is going next and on the way home
refuses to look at the birds.
He doesn't know that one day
he will no longer care
how many birds a city has,
or mind picking his way
over scattered rakes and hoes.
one day, Galen will be able
to look at a deflated face
and body like the rest of us,
and see nothing, even the gardener's,
whose paintings my brother
will find years later,
and keep hung in his bedroom,
because the colors match the wallpaper.

Tiffany Richardson