



The Lark

It was smaller than an apple
bent slightly against the wind
but round, red, and brown against the white
of the forest behind our house.
It had snowed for days and everything was clean.

I'm sure it didn't hear us
coming down the slope into the gully
the dry snow sticking to our boots,
leveling the old rifle toward it
its hard plastic stock,
painted to look like wood,
tucked into my shoulder.

The wet sound of something hard
hitting something soft.

I didn't see anything after the trigger,
the bird was there at the end of my barrel
then not,
but I can see a flash of metal in air
closing our distance faster than I expected.

The pellet entering the center of its eye,
rattling around its skull
like the bottle cap my brother threw into the wall register

just to see if he could,
and immediately forgot,
that we didn't find until winter;
the hot air sending it
again and again against
the metal walls of the vent
like a hitter rounding his bases
dutifully
even after the ball has left the park.

I was only a child
with a toy
but I understood.
My grandfather was dead by then,
A grade school teacher,
A classmate
skeletal child of indeterminate defect
whose eyes
deep set and knowing
I tried my best to avoid.
All like the bird
there at the end of something
then not.

I didn't see anything after the trigger
but I remember how we found him
His fall made a small bowl of the powdery snow
him twitching at the bottom
only a few flecks of red in the white
-not enough to end him surely.
I wanted him to fly
suddenly
to leave me
but he stopped twitching
and we left him.

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