

SOFT COLLAPSE

BY HEDIA ANVAR

Talking about the sad parts of growing up, me, coming of middle age, and he, poised to make it to a hundred, we round the corner in his coastal village and he says, “leave the past,” just when we come upon a perfect baby black bird splayed on the sidewalk. Her feathery fuzz looks warm, her eyes are open, her tail flutters—is it the breeze? I’m desperate for her to be alive. To what end, though, at what level of damage?

Maybe she was edged early out of the nest. I’m pulled to gather her, place her somewhere sacred, green, less brutal than concrete, but my father says, “leave her,” as if once more demanding I leave behind my childhood. His unease looms when I use his phone to create a record of her death—a maestra of flight reduced to concrete and a click.

My parents did better
than theirs, and their kid
who had kids
did better than them,
while I played it safe
as the cool aunt, basking
in my second chance's
childhood. The way my life
went the way
of the destitute for a spell, I
could've sold my
eggs to the infertile
but for the injustice of
a child out there
with my lot's paragenetic
quirks, without
me—in the know, by
virtue of bloodline—
helping it along. Baby bird,
I dream of your real self
leaving your body before
you fell instead of flew.

Flying home, my eyes open
to the assembly of black bird
art lining my nest. "I
wrote a poem inspired
by your style!" texts my niece,
the better version of me, my vicarious do-over,
a teenage toe dipped
in fairytale yet more adept than her aunt
at life: sprinkling
"love-feathers" in her poem
to break her fall, she ends up
sheathed in a feather shawl.
Much better than all this...
concrete.