

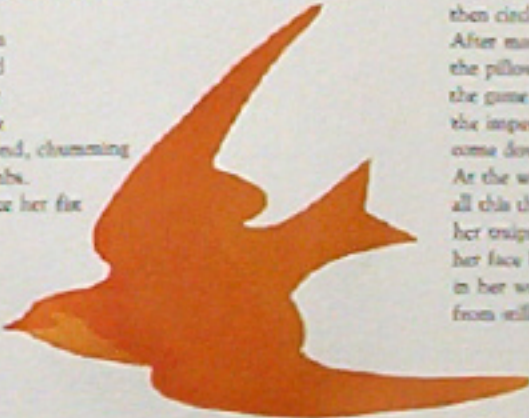
FEATHERING

Many hands before mine have waked
in the dark on that ancient pillow
and lain there on its prisoners' ticking,
wondering at the strangeness within themselves
they had been part of moments ago.
Yesterday she ripped out its stitches
at one end, and today, standing on the stone bench
and gripping the stained shapeless thing like a sack,
she delves with her hand and extracts
a small puffy fistful of duck down.
Bits of it drift toward the ground
and suddenly tree swallows appear.
She takes the arm topped by the down
straight up in the air
and stands there like a mom
at a school crossing or a god
of sundrime about to release
a stream of bits of plenitude
or herself, long ago, at a pond, chumming
for sunfish with bread crumbs.
At accelerations of the breeze her fix

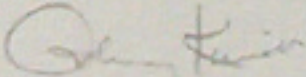
loosens and parcels out upward
rumbles of these birds' nest zero
on the scale of materiality.

With a flap, a swallow, one of the dozen
now looping and whirling about her,
strikes at a feather, misses, twists
on itself and struts back and now
snaps its beak shut on it and scans
out over the field to mislead or to glow,
then circles back to where its nest box is.
After many misses and catches, she ties off
the pillow, ending for today
the game they make of it when she's there,
the imperative to feather one's nest
come down from the Pliocene.
At the window, where I've been watching
all this through bird glasses, I see
her strapping back to the house,
her face lighted, a sideways lurch
in her walk, as if she's a bit tipsy
from still being where she has been.

GALWAY KINNELL

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First published in *The New Yorker*


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