

**BRUCE BOND**

**Audubon**

**1**

The night my father died I buried myself  
in a little language, a testament of will,  
measured out the way the stonecutter

measures out our names to make them fit,  
and as I leaned beneath the bell of light  
to the cursor where it pulsed, I placed there

neither man nor the shape of his absence,  
not grief as I knew it, but the tiny bones  
of ink that grief made, rising to the surface.

I have met with those who disapprove  
of passing through too quickly into song,  
as if, with death, we give to it the first

word which is none at all. Anything more  
is to make light of suffering: mine, yours.  
Or worse, to make far too much of it,

to lose oneself in the futures market  
that seeks to clear a profit on misfortune.  
They have a point. That is, some songs need

a certain hesitation to break the ice  
and move more deeply into winter's current.  
Then again, tending to a song's needs

gives loss a vocation, and who is to say  
what will come of it, any more  
than what comes of music while it lasts.

2

Audubon loved the creatures that he killed.  
That is part of the story. He loved the music  
he silenced, gutted, stuffed with clouds of cotton,

the bodies he cleansed with a surgeon's care  
then mended with needle, a stitched seam  
tucked beneath the feathers where they shone.

He loved the eyes that gave way to seeds  
of glass, the small black blisters gleaming  
with light that went just so far, so deep.

Somewhere in that region of inquiry,  
in what he could not paint, the illusion  
of life took, and fluttered to the surface,

informing the angle of the head, the beak,  
the bright rustle of wings as the ivory-  
billed woodpecker turns away from us

to make out some motion in the distance.  
Movement is danger. Or so the heartbeat  
says at first, until it settles back

onto its perch, its branch of understanding.  
What you see within the sure lines and blush  
of these renditions is an artist's gaze,

so steady, cautious as it crosses the lip  
of stillness, our open coffin, careful not  
to break the perfect silence where it breathes.

3

Suppose all the world is a house lit up  
against the night, and the eye of the bird  
our only window. If you look through

the black air, you just might see a man,  
a father, say, who takes his broken sleep  
down the hall to a desk in the distance.

He is peering over his heavy glasses  
to the near at hand, papers that await  
his signature to put his affairs in order.

When he writes, his pen bleeds a little  
ink over the line, real or imagined,  
to lay a name against the emptiness.

Birds slip into the flowered portraits  
of his study, silent, and yet made flesh  
by the hand that murdered to create them.

The Carolina pigeon dips the nib  
of his beak into the mouth he feeds.  
If he spreads his colors, ribbed in black,

it is one more song that calls the thing  
unseen. The man closes up his desk,  
and with it a passage in his testament,

the part where he asks to be scattered,  
remembered the way a body remembers to breathe.  
A ghost thread pulls outward, like a word.