**Heartbeat**

Lisken Van Pelt Dus

When I was small,

I held a dead bird,

its feathered roundness

and heavy head

filling my cupped hands.

I hoped for a flutter

of heartbeat

but there was nothing –

only a little leftover heat.

I had forgotten about this

until you died.

I wanted what few hours

it had been to unwind themselves,

give the fledgling back

to its nest and me to a time

before this weight

in my palms

and in my breath

thick like cold water sinking.

Under your bluster, you too

a small bird –

bones curved toward sky,

wings beating just hard enough

to be heard, heart

a dense jewel like an eye.

Now I dream I hold you once more.

Your feathers shift and settle,

brush against my lifeline.

I lift your bird-weight,

white columns of air.