

JANE MCKINLEY

Mourning Dove

From the stopped train I watch a dove
brace the wind, her beak full of dried grass,
head bobbing, eyes blinking as she's blown about,
claws fastened tight to the flailing yew.

It was a day like this your hair fell out.
You were sitting in the garden,
throwing it like caution to the wind.
Silk lining for birds' nests, you said.

You believed in offerings, in ritual,
in cosmic coincidence. The next winter
I found you there again, dancing
like a Druid, worshipping the moon.

It was 20:02 on the twentieth day
of the second month, two thousand two.
I'd happened upon you just in time
to clasp your hands and forge a sacred ring.

The day you told me *two more months*,
my daughter, nine, asked me a riddle.
Who do we want to live forever?
I'll give you a hint: it's a girl.

You'd prayed for one more spring
and got it: snow-encrusted daffodils,
iris lashed by rain to purple shreds,
garden too boggy for a wheelchair.

This week, before the train moves on,
I try to spot the mourning dove, but all
that's left are wisps of straggly grass. Perhaps—
like you—she's holding out for silk.