



December Incident

He described some yellow birds he loved
and from the description,
I figured *goldfinches*. He said that thinking
about the birds—

well, it helped him to sleep. Sometimes in bed,
his mom and her boyfriend
could be pretty noisy. I wondered why
he was sharing all this.

One cheek showed a small white scar. Sometimes,
“Mom and you know”—
he jerked his head back toward the truck behind us—
“they break stuff downstairs.”

He’d turned nine that morning, he said. I don’t know
what moved him to tell me
what he told me next: “I never seen
the ocean or nothin’.”

We stood in a hillside town, well inland.
We each had trash
to drop at the transfer station. Behind us
the man in the pickup

cracked his window so we could hear
George Jones sing a song,
“If Drinkin’ Don’t Kill Me.” The man bumped his horn
and barked out “Howie!”

The boy picked up his sack and went on
to the compactor truck.
The man stared at me. “We ain’t here to play,”
he grunted. I’m old,

he was young and burly, the morning was windy,
clouds galloped by.
I looked up as if something bright might be flying
through that sullen sky.



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