

# THE BIRDS OF AMERICA

by Elizabeth Dodd

After the photograph fixes the image  
in stasis, the mind keeps wheeling back. What

does it feel like, this hovering memory—  
a flavor from childhood, a word the tongue

can't quite call forth. The heirloom pear's crisp,  
pre-war tang, discovered in a farmer's market far

from home, *la poire, le marché*, their rhotic rr  
a bur in the throat—but why these thoughts

incongruous in time and distance? Unpack  
the century's texture: the ribbed spiral of the live wires,

the insulator's unfocused globe. The bird's neck arcs,  
a dancer's head flung back, beak rising in the ecru

air and there—the flash of apricot beneath the  
scissor-tail's wing recalls the water-colored throat,

*la gorge*, of Audubon's *Columba migratoria*,  
the Passenger Pigeon. From a lichen-speckled

branch the female reaches, arabesque, to feed her mate.  
"The tenderness and affection displayed by these birds,"

he wrote, "are in the highest degree, striking."  
But these flycatchers only mimic, in my eye-rhyme

of their forms, extinction's apparition assembled  
from the Haitian's paintings of some buckshot skins.

Now, let your eye lift from the crouched male's echo  
of a vanished dance, to where, along a road in rural

Kansas, the other male, wings and tail akimbo, feet  
clenched like fists beneath the body, hangs

—momentarily medieval—like a morning star,  
a flail, before the blow.



*Scissor-tailed Flycatcher. Photo by David Rintoul*