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POETRY CONTEST FINALIST

Their wings flutter as they are lifted from their nest—
a confused cacophony that must be ignored.
Cradled in my arms, they hum with happiness,
not knowing that the squeaking
corner of the cart I push counts
the seconds to their death.

When I reach the back room, I sigh
at the remains of their sisters scattered about
and the three hours left in my shift.
I shut my eyes at what I am about to commit,
unable to even spare a look at the names
along the spines that I snap.

And I grossly admire
their insides—
the beautiful black and white entrails
carved out by my hand's blade.

Each time, I grab the next one off the cart
to prepare its final rites, I raise it to my face
and inhale the sweet vanilla musk of its pages.
A final goodbye, a flurry of lashes, a kiss of sorts
to thank it.

