

Grouse's Wing

I don't want to frighten the young
boy who needs someone older
to ride with him up the mountain,
someone who can reach over his head
and pull down the chair lift's safety bar,
who isn't his father, who asks
his name, his grade, things
he doesn't know if he can say
to a stranger. I give him
what someone had given me
a moment's ride before, who told me
he carved birds for a living even
in this economy. When the chair
swayed too much in the wind
and we slid against each other,
the carver told me to look down
in front of us where our shadows were
flying over. He pointed to the small
tracks stepping out of the woods
(there no one skis on purpose)
to the outline of a wing,
a grouse's, he said, which lifts off
the snow by pressing down its wing
when anything comes too close.
So then, if the lift stopped in mid-ride
and, for a minute, the boy and I thought
we would stay there, swaying in the wind
forever, I could show him where
the grouse needed to break from
the woods, to leave this sign the next skier
will see, a new snow will erase.