

ROGER CAMP

## UNFLEDGED

The gun was a secret  
we kept from my mother.

In the backyard  
we peeled the tape

off the cardboard cylinder  
carefully pouring  
the copperclad BBs  
down

the metal-throated chamber  
a death rattle following  
their rolling concert.

Cocking the lever

to the satisfying sound  
of a chambered round  
the first target of opportunity  
an overripe orange

hanging from our tree.  
Its thick skin  
soon pincushioned with holes  
juice dripping

off the base.  
Handed the rifle  
as a hummingbird shot by  
a thoughtless shot

on the fly  
brought it crashing down.  
Cradled in my hand  
a single drop of hot blood

leaked from its downy chest  
branding my flesh.  
Thirty years of penance  
five tiny avian lives saved

the first  
from a feral cat  
on the driveway  
my calming voice

treating for shock  
until its disordered feathers  
shook free.  
Another, a fledgeling

fallen from nest, replaced.  
Two more  
struck senseless by glass  
masquerading as sky

recovering in my palm.  
The last mummified  
thrashing on my leafstrewn lawn  
my trembling fingers

tongue-tied  
peeling off the silky strands  
until the spider's web unraveled.

Then a quick calculation  
wondering if five lives  
redeems one  
careless  
callow  
youth.