

RED-TAILED HAWK

Fandango dancer, fan that fluttered
in the violet expanse of twilight:
By the creek bed where we chanced to
spy her, my son and I on horseback,
she hopped
in impotent protest, too weak
to thrust her beak at us. Puffed feathers
broadcast only soundless fury.

In make-shift cage
of laundry basket, gloved hands
evading talons, probed her wings
for what we thought a gunshot wound
but found instead
the crusted-over, sliced-through bone
and tendon. In rush descent
on finch or dove she must have crashed
into the nerve-net strung from pole to pole.

We force-fed bits of liver with a tweezers.
Drove twenty miles to raptor clinic; still, the human
contact, or the day's starvation
did her in. The ancients teach
we learn through suffering—yet
what could she have learned, those hours
in the dry arroyo, wing trailing, but
to make it through another day, swirl
again those dancer's garments, spread russet fan
to haul a meal of blood and bone
up to the crag's
nestful of unfinished things.