

# The meaning of birds

by [Angela Alaimo O'Donnell](#) in the [February 6, 2007](#) issue

Snow falling into my open hands.  
*Like grace. Like mercy, I say.*  
*Flecks of light from heaven.*  
*Splinters of struck stars.*

The birds fly frantic.  
They can't keep the snow  
from their feathers  
so fast it falls and free.

Something says *keep moving.*  
*Keep moving or you'll die.*  
*Stiff wings and a stopped heart*  
*the price of rest.*

They leap from branch to branch,  
flap their bodies dry,  
glide and light and glide again,  
heads hunched in the wind.

What will fill their hunger,  
stoke the flame of beating wings  
when what lives lies buried  
beneath the soft weight of white?

What mercy for the birds,  
seed of sky and worm of earth?  
The grace in my full hands  
comes a cold, slow sleep.