

# *Tiny Bills*

SUSAN JOHNSON

Mist nets catch the fall migration,  
catch my hands numb and slow as  
they try to free each bird reversing

the path of entry, clearing the feet first  
even as tiny bills hammer my thumb  
for blood, more blood and my own

feet become enmeshed in roots and mud.  
It's the large birds that look dangerous  
that just lie there. Sapsuckers, flickers.

As with any transaction, it's the small  
biting words that jab, inflame a nail.  
That wake you with their peck peck

peck. Those same nets caught me  
in their fine meshed traps. Until I  
reached into their tangled pockets to

remove another just passing through,  
I didn't know how hard love could be  
standing ankle-deep in muck in the middle

of the woods in the middle of an island  
in the middle of the sea with my hands  
full of flight and nothing to hold on to.