

Dreams of Flight

BETH PAULSON

A man with wings large enough and duly attached might learn to overcome the resistance of air. Leonardo da Vinci

No Icarus, you knew pulleys and winches would keep a man tethered to earth though he rise high above a stage for a duke's entertainment. In your *fabrico* you built mechanical birds of wood and bright-dyed linen, then raised men up on ropes to fly and float, angels with dark curls, gilt-edged wings.

A boy, you walked the path between the houses of your father and your mother through fields, vineyards outside Florence where you marked how a dove moves its wings swiftly when it lowers them, raises them to fly higher. How birds steer through the wind's motion. How they lower their tails, lift them. Did you picture in your mind how you might ascend into the blue like *un uccello* you held in your hand, so light, such soft feathers?

And do we all as children not dream of flying? Try jumping down a flight of stairs or off a roof or branch of a tree we climbed? Head bump or skinned knee. A young boy, doing flips in the backyard, goes airborne for seconds, defies gravity.

Your whole life you sketched swirls of water, fluid air like a lover's hair,
elegance of bone and feather, drew hundreds of studies, pages that filled
your notebooks. Inside you lived the artist who imagined, the inventor
who obsessed. Even in old age, when you visited the duke at Sforza,
you stood at your window marveling at the four-winged dragonflies
above the moat, treading summer air.