

An afternoon in the nursing home

Brown skin, so wrinkled with sunlight:
You've known pain.

I hold your gaze—harrowed, lost, as if you
Had stolen the first rays of dawn.
The world asked for them back but you
refused,
Eyes searching for a home again.

The walls of the nursing home peel back,
unfurling;
The worn piano with stains and dulled
wood—I play a note
And it rings unnaturally loud, piercing
the walls.

The air tastes like
An ice cube, melting, cold, numb,
I do—
I do feel lonely.
Your wheelchair is stiff; my feet shuffle
tentatively after each other,
Pushing you forward.
You are made of dust, and stars, and sky.
I wonder if you have ever tenderly
embraced a child;
Screamed at a lover,
Felt the gut-wrenching weight of
existence—

As we all do, sometimes.

In the light from the window, a red
canary lands on a branch.

Can you see?

—Qiang Zhang



Illustration by Ezra Gilmore