Gray Squirrels, One Robin

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My mother,
her head sinking into pillows,
curses squirrels --
their daring, high wire act,
these other lives hanging
in the balance,
crossing telephone cable
hooked to the house
above the window.
For days they made her flash
accents of life.
"They keep me awake all day long,
running on the roof," she'd say.

My father,
his old legs wobbling on rungs,
traps squirrels
off the pitched roof --
the cage held tightly in one hand,
the trip wire set,
smeared with peanut butter.
"I caught eleven and one robin," he said. "I brought them
to the cemetery and let them go."

Now she enters
her long residence at Maryhill.
The robin remains, its bold crest
blazing through the bony tree.
My dad and I listen for gray squirrels.
"They'll never come back," I say.