

Syllabics

Clint Margrave

A bird crashed into the gym window while I was on the Stairmaster
looking out over an empty

soccer field and listening to a boring poetry podcast
about syllabics.

Window, I thought, that's two syllables.
And bird, poor bird, one.

They say that sometimes when this happens a bird
will go unconscious
and survive,

but I was on the second floor of a tall building
and watched it drop straight down

leaving a few feathers gliding
behind it in the morning air.

The bird seemed to be in a hurry,
like it was late for work,
or being chased
by the cops,

and not paying attention
when it made the fatal mistake,

like the poet on the podcast who
put an extra syllable in one of her lines
and when asked if it were intentional
said, "Ohhhh,"
which is exactly what I said
when the bird hit the window.

A syllable being defined as
"a vocal sound uttered with a single effort of articulation."

In English, of course, we think of syllables
as stressed
or unstressed,
kind of how we think of people.

I hadn't even been thinking about fate
that morning as I sweat on the stairs
trying to get myself unstressed,

not thinking about how easy it is to crash right into your
fate while trying to avoid it.

I usually thought about that while driving,
especially since I ran that red light last year
and crashed right into a black Volkswagen

(three syllables), which could have killed me
and/or the other driver, but luckily (also three syllables) didn't.

I was headed to the gym, no less,
which, as my friend Tim later remarked,
is "what I get for going in the first place,"
noting the irony

like we note it when we read Oedipus,
a Greek play nonetheless,
syllabics coming from the Greek συλλαβή (syllabē) meaning
"that which is held together,"

something I learned on the podcast
where I also learned to think of a syllable as a way
to divide a word

like how a window divides
a building from a bird

or how breath divides
the living from the dead.

