

Peter E. Murphy

Do Not Resuscitate

Mother is a casualty of the depression, the war.
Hitler must have touched her breasts, slapped
her face, set her hair on fire.

She could have used a priest.
She could have used a magician.
Instead she sips a highball and hangs laundry

that freezes on the roof of the tenement.
Huge pelicans live in the chimney, she says.
Be good, or they'll eat you!

I make believe the roof is the tower of a castle,
the buildings around me other castles,
the street below a moat.

I make believe I am good, but I am terrible.
I am tired of you, Mother yells, raising
her enormous wings and carrying me away.

No, mommy, no! I cry looking down
at the countryside that has turned back
into a city. Mother drops me on the stoop

of a church where pelicans float down from their stained
glass and nurse me with the blood of Christ,
where the priests pass their hands over my body,

making sure I am stiff before laying me into the earth.

