My Mother Tries to Teach Me About Listening, or: Another Poem About Birds

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I want to know the yellowthroat’s quick trill
as it ricochets off my window and the song
he passes on to his young. I want to learn
birdsong: how to identify a species from its call
and know whether, like a bird’s, a child’s voice
is a kind of aural fingerprint, unique in its demands
for Goldfish® or the swing-push that would
shatter the barrier between earth and heaven.

Before you first strained your ears toward
the sound of my breathing and mothered the night
into my lungs, before you memorized every
thorned and honeyed edge of my voice—
did you feel this way too? Will I ever listen
to a child’s voice and hear it
otherworldly? learn it well enough
to paint its spectrogram by heart?