

By Stephanie Munro

“ ‘Hope’ ” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all ”--Emily Dickinson

It is morning. I take my coffee into the yard and think about grief. How heavy it wraps itself into each new day.

I sit with it, as they say we are to do, as if we can do much else. Surrender to its weight, to the way the whole of me seems irrevocably altered by it. How I move slower, now, in the mornings. Much slower.

Outside, the yard is full of green. My daughter tumbles onward, towards the coral bean plant. I watch her curls sway with her momentum, her hands reaching for everything she can touch and feel.

I sit with my grief and watch my daughter, a little whirlwind of senses and feeling and thoughts forming the way I think the universe was once made, a slow beginning and then all at once. She is almost there, to the heart shaped leaves and their pointed bright flowers.

So small you most often miss him, but not today. This morning I see a hummingbird, that magic thing, above my daughter, hovering from one bright bulb to the next. He is a stunning creation, ruby crested, he seems to defy the logic of survival. How can something so small travel so far? How did he find our solitary coral plant, with leaves waiting like an outstretched hand for him to eat? How did he learn to continue on, so swiftly, as he no doubt has known loss, too. The nature of being alive, after all, is to often say goodbye without knowing it at all.

My grief and I watch all of this; my daughter, the hummingbird, both reaching for those flowers. The movement is jarring and beautiful and shocking against the company of me and my grief. And just as it began, that tiny bird swiftly leaves us, and my eyes attempt to match his pace and find him, hovering towards the large avocado tree in my neighbor's yard.

It felt like watching a secret we weren't ever supposed to know, when I caught him at rest on a tree branch. The stillness of him, without the manic movements of his wings.

I hold my breath as he remains still, weightless. I feel a churning movement within me, without words; purely feeling. And then he is gone, and I lose his smallness against the backslash of trees and leaves and power lines.

Each morning we go out to the yard; my grief, my daughter, and me. The coral bean plant beckons us to merely witness it and what it provides simply by being alive. Our hummingbird friend floats by, as do starlings and sparrows; and all those winged entities that sing out to me

with their flutter and flight to tell me about it, life and death and the way if you really listen, you can hear the smallest whisper of hope, taking a rest in the world on a tree branch.