

The Bird

in memory of John

by [Margaret Mackinnon](#) in the [September 2024](#) issue
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i.

As if he understood the language of the birds,
it was my brother who'd glimpsed it first:
a dove resting on the branch above that spot

where we placed our mother's ashes in the ground.
Around us, sounds of an old, familiar hymn—
Come home, come home—

Ye who are weary come home—
and the bird paused. Time seemed to stop,
turning into something not yet known,

something almost new, lasting as long
as the song. And then, the white bird flew,
rising over the tender green of new leaves,

rising until we could not see it in that
wide, expansive blue, where
a slender moon already marked the sky.

ii.

And was it that same moon, years later,
marking the hours of my brother's long illness,

long nights when sleep had fled?
He said he was on a journey he'd taken once,

a young man again, hitching rides across
the wild places of the West. Again

inside those dim, silvery spaces
of a truck's snug cab, listening again

to the stories of those who rode with him,
their secrets, their private, fragile joys.

At first, a chaos of sound—
but then, clear, distinguishable. And so,

he let them come, voices like
odd, remembered dreams—

companions on the road. All of them
held within that darkness framed in light.

iii.

And it was in the angled light of almost-
winter that we climbed the broken path
past manzanita, past oaks and twisted pine
to remember him. We tied prayer flags
between the bare-branched trees. Stretched
out above the little town he'd loved,
the bright squares of green and red
and yellow flapped in a chill wind,
pattern almost like song—

Come home, come home—

the air rising sharp in rising dark,
the day a long road carved from loss.
My brother had traveled on beyond us all.
We looked out toward whatever was shining
far away—attentive to evidence of some
great migration. And searching, always,
for some small sign of flight.