

## 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.