

THE DISAPPEARANCE OF PHOEBE

by Michael H. Lester

As suddenly as she appears, she vanishes, and with her something inside me is lost. A void in place of the fullness she brought that first day and the days, weeks, and months that followed. Her absence is not soon forgotten in the dizzying array of pretenders who come and go in their dispassionate anonymity.

*I harbor
an image of Phoebe
in black and white
wearing a feathered gown
beneath her scruffy crown*

Skittering through shrubbery like thieves in the night, these white-crowned sparrows in their private hideaways guard their secrets in the flora. The California Towhee swoops down from the fence to wriggle its way into the maze of wire cages meant to support the tomato plants but repurposed to keep out the squirrels.

*a maze of mesh
guards the blueberry suet
for the local birds—
they enter from all directions
leaving their small gratuities*

With the arrival of spring, Phoebe and a friend have returned to the garden, perching alternately on the overhead wires, the tomato cages, the spent orchid stems, and on the wooden fence. It's good to have her back as a regular customer, her absence having made the heart grow fonder.

*there are no words
to express my gratitude
for this Phoebe
who has chosen my yard
as a favorite hunting ground*



Photo: Jonathan Coffin/Flickr