

DO THE BIRDS STILL SING?

Dana Johnson

I remember I used to hear the birds sing.
I would wake up and hear them right outside on my patio.
Then one day it stopped.
I can't be sure if they stopped singing or if I could no longer hear them.
It was a thing.
THE thing.
The thing that gets in the way of all of the other things.
The thing I won't let myself acknowledge or talk about with anyone.
After that day, the birds stopped singing.
The birds stopped singing, the air felt old, the light seemed to dim,
my friends felt like acquaintances, love felt distant, and the list goes on and on and on.
The pain is the thing I won't let myself feel.
I put the memory in a secret little box buried deep in my memory.
I try so hard to forget.
To not jump when someone stands too close to me in public.
To not be afraid in my home at night.
To not be untrusting of people who say they care for me.
But I can't seem to win.
Even though I hide it, my dreams make me remember.
I can see it, feel it, hear it, smell it, fear it ... as if it is happening in that moment.
And then I scream. And I wake. And I cry.
I thought it was supposed to get better.
It doesn't.



But today, everything seems particularly dark and dull.
And I am not sure I want to go outside and exhaust myself by trying to forget.
Forgetting is hard and tiresome.
The memories seem to haunt me like my own shadow.
There is no way to get rid of a shadow. It's always there.
Even if it is just watching and waiting for the sun to poke through.
I wonder what it would be like to be a black hole.
Alone and dark and suffocating.
That is starting to seem even more exhausting.
It is now when I realize the sun is rising.
I only realize because there is the faintest sound of something familiar.
When I really empty my mind and search for the sound, I start to hear it.
The song. The birds. On my patio.
I don't know why I hear it today when I haven't heard that song in so long.
I remember liking the sound. Finding it soothing and calming.
It almost feels that way now.
A black hole sounds lonely.
I don't want to be a black hole.
I don't want to be empty and dark and a void.
I want to live.
I want to exist.
I don't know how.
But I know...
I need to know if the birds still sing.

