

Describe Your Grief

TOM HAWKINS

I am driving a back road
where there are still farms,
fenced cattle, tobacco barns.

I can't describe my grief,
unless it's like marching
into a lost war, folding clothes by numbers,
waiting in rank for breakfast
beneath the steamy electric lights
before dawn, crawling in a cave
that hasn't been mapped.

I round a curve and see two birds
flapping in the road.
One has been hit
by a car, and its mate
flutters just above,
wild to inspire
its fallen partner's flight.

When Anna was ill,
I would have seen her as the fallen bird,
injured in the road, as I hovered,
watching her struggles,
urging her to fly on broken wings.

But now she is gone,
with our marathon conversations,
her startling questions.

And I don't know
which of those two birds
I am.