FLASH NONFICTION

On the Death of a Chipmunk

by Annika Nerf



"Garden Peace" by Josephine Florens

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I find you, self-contained in a ball, eyes closed. Front flower bed, 40°F, no snow. You lie nestled into the last shoots of the black-eyed Susans. You are dying, but at that point, I do not know.

I turn a shoe box into a refuge, one I have had for seven years, previously used for collecting postcards. A purple towel inside, then you. Then a hot-water bottle underneath the box, and waiting. Calling wildlife rehabilitators, no reply. Then: the vet. The box is taken away and I sit, past closing time. The doctor comes, shakes my hand and tells me that your heartbeat is as slow as a human's, much too slow for a rodent. There is significant trauma on your face and only one thing to be done. It is my decision, though I do not want this choice.

Your heart was still beating strongly when we left my car, I could see it; but now they've taken you through to the back and given you an injection into your abdomen. You are brought back to me in the purple towel. I guess you are gone already, because your chest is no longer rising, but the nurse tells me it can take up to five minutes, so I nod and I hold you anyway.

I had sung to you in the car, going to the vet, you in your little shoe box with holes I had stabbed urgently into the lid. I had sung to you in the car, because you never know; how else could I have let you know I was still there?

Tomorrow I will bury you by the roots of the oak; I will give you a bluebell bulb into the grave.

I will lay an aster on the freshly-turned soil and say this: You lived. You were good at living, cunning and fast and outwitting predators. You survived every day. Just not this one.

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