

The Structure of Sustenance · *Pattiann Rogers*

In the month of March, Albert plans
An expedition up the eastern side
Of the nearest mountain.

Kioka says bands of Peruvians coming down
The mountain have reported seeing flocks of hummingbirds
In a meadow near the summit, hummingbirds
With invisible wings, blue-green heads and thumb-bellies
Of scarlet-orange. Kioka believes the trumpet vines
That cover the meadow have swallowed the wings
Of the hummingbirds.

Albert thinks that the hummingbirds, if they exist,
Have changed themselves into Peruvians with ponchos
Of blue-green and scarlet-orange thrown over their shoulders,
That they have come down from the mountain
To repeat their own legends.

The Peruvians seem to go easily up and down
The mountain as if they had invisible wings.
And they themselves say that their women
Go up to the meadow alone to mate
With the hummingbirds in May. They claim their babies
Nurse on trumpet blossoms in the meadow
Until they are old enough to fly.

According to legend,
The ancient Peruvian word for nipple is,
“Sweet-nectared blossom of orange.”

Last fall a black-eyed woman by a mountain road
Gave Sonia a basket of trumpet blossom vines
And old hummingbird nests. Scarlet-gold yarn
And bits of turquoise wool could be seen woven
With spider silk among the threads of the old nests.

Sonia likes to think that hummingbirds are simply
Scarlet-orange trumpet blossoms clipped from the vine,

Given invisible wings and green tongues, that their bellies
Are always full of their own honey.

The title of Cecil's most recent oil painting is:
"Green Hummingbird Tongue Licking an Orange Nipple."

Gordon is looking through his magazines
For an article entitled "An Analysis of Nectar,
With a View toward Predicting the Structure
Of the Creatures it Sustains."

Sometimes Felicia waits beside the lake at dawn
Until the sky is the exact color of trumpet blossoms.
Then she imagines she is the wing of a hummingbird
Caught inside the orange stomach of a flower
Or a Peruvian baby wrapped in a wool nest, nursing
At her mother's breast.

"Hummingbirds Speaking with Peruvian Tongues"
Is the title of an old song without words.

Albert is spending every day now assembling
And checking his gear. He has ordered bird traps
And vine clippers. And every night Gordon falls asleep
Working on his newest book, *Scarlet-feathered
Flowers and Egg-producing Vines in the Legends
Of the Upper Andean Plains.*

Felicia has had a telescope mounted at her window
And will watch for Albert's campfire every evening
In March. He will set a lone pine ablaze at the summit
If he has seen hummingbirds or Peruvians,
And he will shoot an orange flare into the sky
If either has spoken.

Kioka will accompany him, traveling
Out of sight without fire.

It's only January.
"Legend Full of Its Own Nectar" is the name
Of this winter.