**Hope in a Child’s Garden**

**by Jeffree Wyn Itrich**

No doubt we are living in very challenging times. Scary times really. We see it, we breathe it, we live it every day. We wonder if our lives will ever return to the way it was before COVID-19 bore down on us like a tsunami, before riots broke out in our streets. I have been as concerned as everyone, worried that our lives have been changed forever. Sometimes I think that we’re living in a dream or someone’s idea of a joke, and then I remember that it’s not a dream nor a joke, but a pandemic of biblical proportions and a societal shift in our country’s future. Thousands of businesses and homes have been destroyed by the virus or by rioting. It’s enough to make you want to stick your head down a hole, and hide from the world. Will this madness never stop? Is there any chance that our lives will ever return to something even slightly similar to our previous existence?

After witnessing something recently, something extraordinary in its simplicity, I realized that we might just return to what our lives were like before havoc rained down upon us. As I watched the scene unfold, I grasped what I’d been missing. Until that moment, I didn’t even realize that I’d been craving the comfort of ordinariness, of normality. It was that familiarity that’s been absent and all it took was a group of young children to remind me that there is ordinariness all around us; all we have to do is look – it’s there.

I was in my backyard weeding my vegetable garden when I noticed the children next door hoeing, digging, raking, and prepping a small area in their backyard. I called over the fence and asked if they were going to plant a vegetable garden, too. They replied that they had found a baby bird who had fallen out of its nest and died. They were preparing a grave for the little thing they named Birdie. A couple of hours later I was back out in the garden when the kids called over to me. They said that they had finished the grave and were about to hold a funeral service for the tiny bird; they asked me if I would join them. How could I refuse?

Each child said a few words, remarking on Birdie’s short life and how it was now in a better place. These four kids, ranging in age from five to ten years old, took it upon themselves to do something right for a small being whose life was cut short. What they did wasn’t so unusual, kids are always burying things they find and giving them funerals. What lifted my spirits was how normal their actions were. They weren’t concerned about Covid-19, they weren’t concerned about the battles raging on Capitol Hill or mayhem in the streets, they weren’t concerned that our economic prosperity had been yanked out from beneath us. No, they were more concerned with providing a fitting funeral for a life not unlike their own, young, sweet and innocent. It was such a normal act of kindness; it reinforced my faith in the future.

I believe it was the five-year-old who found Birdie, though there was some disagreement on that matter. I’m not sure which child suggested they dig a grave, give it a marker with Birdie’s name, and hold a funeral service. It didn’t really matter who initiated the gesture; all the children were in agreement that it was the proper thing to do. As I watched the children, I marveled at how they took it upon themselves to do the right thing for a little being they never knew, and at that moment I saw that our future is in good hands. All around us are children, like my little neighbors, who know what is just and decent. As my Nana used to say, they’ve been yanked up right. These kids have pure hearts and they know that everyone, even a tiny bird, has worth. I figure that if our youngest generation can uphold and preserve what is important, I am confident that we’re going to be fine.