

HONEY

I have been indoors long enough that sometimes I imagine the rug is the ocean's edge and the sand beneath my feet is stirred up by tide pulling me in and out. It would almost be reverie but for the numbers of dead that grow each day. More than those on the dark wall in D.C. where one's face is reflected in the carved letters of a boy killed in war. Every Covid death is like the shadow of gulls blocking the sun, numerous, chaotic. Catch them. Bring the dead back. A poet says, *I swallow down the good-byes I won't get to use.* Another poet says, *the human face has vanished.* And when I read those words, the ocean floor becomes East New York, Brooklyn where the sweet man on the corner displays hubcaps like planets, hanging their round silvery bodies from the garage door, and in front of his shop, a Haitian woman selling sugar cane. Now, many years since I've seen them, are they safe?

I'm not locked in. I am here voluntarily. Gratefully. Peacefully, with two rescue dogs, one whose back spasms and twists at the slightest touch, her vertebrae collapsed on one another. One who presses against me as I move from room to room. Eight years in he is still afraid I will give him away. Maybe because of the shadow and number of the gulls, maybe because of the dogs, I suddenly cannot kill anything. When heavy rain and wind snap an old limb off the tree I cry and move it to the flatbed trailer and think about taking it to the woods one day, to do something with it. I don't know what, it just looks like a leg that should be buried in sacred ground.

I've never killed spiders, I have long admired their tenacity and inventiveness. Small ones I carry outside on my index fingers. Large ones, especially scary ones, I put a glass over and slide a paper plate under it and toss it onto the lawn. I could, however, always kill a conifer bug, the way they cluster in the sun and flutter their red underbellies near my face. But not now. Moths, no. They are like dust and bother no one. That annoying fly, not this year. This year the swatter encourages it to reconsider someone else's house. And in the gap under my rain gutter three dips hold wasp nests. Other years I would've called the exterminator, but this year, a sparrow has also built a nest there and the diligence and design of the nests discourage me. As I do less work in the world, I am more hesitant to destroy the work of others.

Last Wednesday as I stood admiring the hornet nests and feathery construction of the sparrows, a bumble bee, yellow-fat and sluggish, circled my head. It displaced the air with its floating body, seemingly aimless, but who am I to interpret the bee's intention? A friend who has traveled the world looking for the Bird of Paradise, calls to tell me she has found it and it is a pigeon on a street in New York City. She also tells me about killer hornets and how they are in Washington State, and that they are decimating bee hives, with sharp jaws atop their one and a half inch bodies they are decapitating the bees.

I am back to the idea of killing. Is this power ever far from us? To squash and re-shape a life? And has my small world always been filled with such choices? I diligently apply my mask to protect strangers, and gloves to protect myself. All around me, the speed and diligence of other lives, trusting me to notice them and to live with mercy and grace.