

Cicada Killing Wasp and Cicada

When I left the house this morning, there was a ruckus in the grass, a rustling buzz, something digging under leaves. As I got closer and the buzzing intensified, I saw a cicada, pinned by a yellow and black, hard shelled wasp. The cicada fought and shuddered, and stilled. Then tried again to right itself. The wasp, fully the length of my thumb, held the cicada down, as if under water. It was hard to watch a thing struggle to live, slip sideways for a moment and be overcome. Finally, the cicada weakened – slowly it seemed to me, though how could I know what time feels like at the end? I was not called to act, and it's only now, recollecting the scene, that the possibility of doing anything comes to me, at a remove, more as an idea. Watching, I had no thought about intervening. I was absent from the plan.

And there *was* a plan. That was clear. Not a grim, inevitable, plot, or Someone's will, but a choreography, a fitting of bodies, long rehearsed and sketched for this particular yard, this morning, these two and no others. The longer I stayed, the more legible it became.

The wasp moved, I can say this only now, with tenderness along the underside of the cicada. Its gestures were deliberate, a series of little flicks of its head as if licking down the shining body. From where I stood, it looked like care. And since I mean to say what it felt like to see, the moment shivered through me, then a flood of recognition came, the overflow was asking something, the oncoming – what was it? – tension, rose, the seep touched me and I let it because something else was happening and though I didn't know what to call it, it was as startling as any brink arrived at suddenly. That skidding into. Halting. Breathing.

I learned later it was a Cicada Killing Wasp, and what at first looked like devotion was the wasp piercing and paralyzing the cicada with venom. As the wasp kept on, a wave of known

and remembered, long-blocked-out, or joyfully invited moments came up -- my own body tasted, the whole of me open to another and entered. That lavishing. I had not chosen to recall any of this by way of a wasp laying her eggs in the body of a live cicada. But there I was, brought close on terms not my own, to hunger, desire, the far-off retrieved and returned.

At one point, later, the thought did come: I could crush them both, put one out of its misery (the cicada was not dead but immobilized) and keep the other from doing more harm, but that impulse produced a very different shade of disgust, like breaching a promise for my own gain. Or a wrongness perpetrated on this right behavior. Right but hard. Made to be so. Awful, but perfectly arranged, no brutality at all, just the dissonance someone watching it all might bring to the scene.

In quieter moments during the day, I'd picture a flash of iridescent wings, and bright stripes of yellow and black. The two wrestling. The silence in between noisemaking. When I returned from work in the afternoon, a single cicada wing shone on the grass, the body having been dragged off and buried in the damp, underleaf world and, by now, remade as a nursery-and-pantry for the next generation of *Sphex speciosus*.

I stood there for a while as the wind went on carrying invisible spores and seeds and sun warmed the mounds of fir needles brought down by last night's rain.

The act of not looking away carries within it secret reasons for staying with.

Sometimes I try on a certainty like that, to see how it feels to rest for a moment. Because really, I don't think there are reasons, even secret ones, but rather trails and a sense of being led, often for a long time, and without knowing where I'm going or why. And a sense, too, of being identified (by whom I don't know) as dependable. As someone unlikely to veer.

