



BUGS IN PLACES

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Introduction

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My feelings about these bugs are mixed, which helps when I'm drafting a poem but is less helpful when easing you into a collection. I have a lot of feelings about the bugs, as many poets have had in the past. There's a rich poetic tradition across the globe of writing about bugs, back into mythology and fable.

None of the feelings I have are bored ambivalence. A good catch-all would be fascination. When a bug catches my attention, I am fastened to it.

That fastening can be great fun that borders on cuteness (rhinoceros beetle). Sometimes, it's revulsion, like with the creepy-crawly types of bugs (scorpion, mosquito, spider, earwig). I do my best to find some affection even there. This is part of the collection's challenge.

Most often, fastening is a distraction from another task (mantis, ant, spider again).

The bugs are unique shapes and sizes. So it makes sense for them to appear in places and situations most suited to make them stand out. Or appear in places where their presence is funny.

Often, a poem describes objects, events, bugs that are not the poet but can't help talking about the poet. I can find my way into a poem better when my feelings are complicated instead of one flat expression. Bored contempt is not an interesting emotional viewpoint for a poem. Capturing a sudden, emotional vibe is difficult to do in non-poetry writing like prose. Even if I don't write seriously about the bugs, I have to think seriously.

This twelve-poem collection is structured over the course of a day, starting in the morning, going through errands, and ending at night.

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Scorpion Under The Mailbox: An Aubade

Too early in the morning.
Curse your upright posture at danger
which would not have seen
you motionless.

Pity your slow, dumb
departure.

Spit at the light that shows you
with no
shield from wrath.
Pray for forgiveness, that it
arrives quick, precise.

You cannot summon enough
arrogance
to ask for a painless sunlight
that
envelopes you before the end.
Keep your soul as you
embrace the impending
rubber...

When it crushes you, scrapes
you out
back onto the desert, if it is
some comfort,
know that you startled the sky.

Mantis In The Pew: A Hymn

There's some comfort in
knowing that you're not
the only one penitent this
morning.

Accipite et manducate ex hoc omnes

You stick out, bright on pale
fabric and wood.

But this isn't your parish either,
is it?

Little pilgrim practicing
temperance with a sinful
stomach.

Hoc est enim corpus meum

Hunger is more familiar than
this blessing

folded up neat and quiet inside
a prayer,

answer hidden in the asking.

Quod pro vobis tradetur.

Ant At The Dentist's Office

Smell plastic gloves and
peppermint

One inevitability and one lure
towards it

So despite our sweet teeth,
If they catch us, they will pry
us both

Rhinoceros Beetle In The Pharmacy

I thought you were a big dark
clay ladybug at first, pill
poking out from an unscrewed
bottle looking for a balm
to the bent-horn, chipped-paint
ache,
a nudge, a skull ten times too
stuffed.

Instead, you're a
stampede
all by yourself fit in a
thin white paper bag, pawing
to get out of the cold light
with just a relieving nudge.

Grasshoppers In The Garage

Stand

One of you? Welcome in the
desert

The car is here.

Hop

Keeping none of the
sunshine and all of the
sun

The car is gone.

Stand

Don't open up.

The car is here.

Hop

Just jump out of the way.

The car is gone.

Stand

Dozens of you? Go find the
mailbox.

The car is here.

Hop

The radio is nowhere,
but music bounces on the
Door.

The car is gone.

Walking Stick On The Park Bench

Problem with a disguise is
when you don't get eaten, you
don't get dodged, either,
mistaken for a splinter up a
plank of wood or twig carried
down a shade tree or just
vanishing into varnish, only
given away by flowery
nouveau curl between the
arm-rest and frame, crawling
next to warm denim and soft
shoes; just because you're a
leaf doesn't mean you're left to
yourself.

Fly Chittering On The Window

A song speaks of mercies.

Glass is clean,
Afternoon is cooling off from
the summer sun,

Bird pecks but can only touch
the window,
Swatting fan is clumsy,

Kitchen has drops of spilled
cherry juice,
Dinner is not delivered yet,

Eyes see enough to know
song,
Legs can still sing a few more
minutes

Mosquito At The Gas Station, Buzzing Between The Ears

Car (mosquito)

Labrum (pump)

Fill (drink)

Blood (gas)

Ignite (buzz)

Hum (idle)

Fuel (thirst)

Until (until) you (you) have (have)

your (your) fill (fill),

your (your) only (only) blessing (blessing)

is (is) that (that)

you (you) are (are) also (also)

food (food): you (you)

have (have) enough (enough) humility

(humility) to (to) give

(give) back (back) what (what)

you (you) take (take).

Carpenter Bee In The Rafters

When the kitchen vibrates with
laughter, do you feel at home?

Can you find comfort inside
the tree,
soft corpse hollowed out like a
hive?

Do you think a gilded flower
will grow
somewhere up there, in the
roof?

Is there nectar nesting under
the tiles?

Will you have the patience to
love a place?

Until it is empty?

Spider In The Empty Pot

I stain my fingernails with clay,

Paint the sink in earth tones,

And you blend in, find your way out
just before

the brittle soil would make you a
homebody.

Little zombie, I hope you do not stay
buried.

If you find a corner to yourself,
I will be the last to know.

Go find the window when you are
hungry.

Stretch into the sunlight while it is still
nearby.

Stay anywhere but here.

Lightning Bug Under The Doorbell: A Doubled Tanka

Easy to call you starlight or bulb when / neither
waste heat or second thoughts on little you
except / to scoff at an imitation with wings. /
Instead, you're the straggler that summons
stragglers, leaves behind / a car and reaches
back to say safe, unlocked, inside, home.

Earwig In The Pillow: A Nocturne

No vacancies here, gross
nomad.

If I have to share, why you?
Little waxy fella wiped onto
sheets or boxers, whichever is
nearer

A kiss on the nose and then
falling to the floor with a
flourish of sheets

I hear what I tell you caught up
in the wind.

You're no stranger to a thin
patience

All you want is a crumb of
popcorn. Too many here any
way.

There are wings on you
somewhere.

If this is your hotel for the
night, I at least hope you enjoy
the stay in the next bed over.

Notes:

The Latin phrases in “Mantis In The Pew” quote lines from the consecration in the Catholic Mass: “Take this, all of you, and eat of it / for this is my body / which will be given up for you.”

“Lightning Bug Under The Doorbell” is a doubled tanka. A tanka is a Japanese poetic form with a five-line verse. Each line has a specific number of syllables, in the pattern 5-7-5-7-7. So this doubled tanka has double the syllables, with a syllable pattern 10-14-10-14-14.

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