

MAGGIE SCHWED

Pollen Season

Whatever got me (a huzzah from spring) finally left my throat
to jump into my left eye, now red and suppurating like a gorgon's.
I would lift a glass in your direction but I'd have to wash the glass.
Admit impediment. The kids are home, with all their mysteries
and possibilities and old resistances. Love and sex in the air—
tears in the wings. With the thought that not everything
has to get away from us, we should manage family life again.
My old mother wants a man's arm to help her from the car. Oh, come on,
I say, you don't weigh more than a bag of feed. Indignantly,
she puts her hand in mine. The doorknobs in her house give arthritis,
if you don't already have it; the shower, by turns, freezes and scalds
the unwary. Do you share with me this sense, that as ground warms
the world fills again with soldiers? And how strange it is our own
are hidden? Their voices on the radio sound with exhaustion.
I read obsessively about the farmers. Seed savers, believing
in another season. One carries water in a battered pot, ducking
as she runs because the seeds, the seeds must go in, quickly,
even into cratered ground, or famine will be the next year's crop.
Photograph: beekeepers meet under a small tent in the heat of the day.
The beekeeper, who trusts his bees with bare arms, has a guard
and the guard a Kalashnikov. Think of it: guns, they say, like corpses,
store well in vats of honey. And the bees, without borders, pollinate.

As the grass rises, we begin our slaughter. Old hens
head to the stock pot. The hands learn again where organs lie. Twin
rosy cushions of lung, yellow fat's heavy curtain, the green cup of bile.
Body as system: the whole multicolored rope of the guts frees
and pulls forth, crop to vent. (What am I doing, you ask. Learning.
Having learned, I practice my skill.) Again the hand goes in.
Now I harvest embryos: brilliant orange stand-alone yolks, in series.
Ever smaller. And now I scrape the beaded surface of the ovary itself.
Sometimes the finished egg, its shell veiled in membrane, waits
at the terminus of the oviduct. So which do we love, dear friend, death
or life? The excited pullet in the barnyard is running with a three-foot
entail streamer in her beak, the happy cannibal. I say, let's hear it
for the orchestra of sparrows nesting under every eave.