

ANN TWEEDY

nature essay

did you know, if you have a yard
in the right climate, it's probably patrolled
by one male hummingbird? like the god
who knows every hair on your head,
this bird has memorized each flower
in your yard, including the precise times
at which their nectar cups fill up.

in this way, he can manage
his realm (and his sugar fixes)
efficiently. when he's not busy drinking,
he catches insects and defends your yard
against intruder hummingbirds.
so, if, like most americans, you harbor
many secret fears, one of which is being
overrun, you can delete that one.

female hummingbirds, by contrast,
tend to lay low so as not to rile
their touchy counterparts. their reasons
to survive are bigger than whatever charge
they'd get from gorging on nectar cups.

many different conclusions could be drawn.
for one, it seems clear that the image
of the hummer with its long beak buried
in a trumpet-like flower is indeed phallic.
another is that, for the benefit of survival,
it is sometimes necessary to weigh
the costs of pleasure carefully. finally,
you might apprehend that you do not really
own your property: some hummingbird probably
has an equally valid claim and knows it more intimately.

vanishing hoof-prints

in the northeast corner of
washington and the northern tip
of idaho, thirty mountain
caribou wander the selkirk
range, crossing back
and forth to canada.
they eat witch's hair
or old man's beard—lichens
that hang from the dense,
old-growth canopy.
they are shy, so hardly
anyone sees them; only
a few more know of them.

now the whir
of snowmobiles interrupts
their quiet trek
through once-hushed whiteness.
their snowshoe hooves
are becoming useless.
as you read this, insatiable
logging companies dismantle
the remaining canopy—
trucks rattle mountain
roads, pronged flat-beds
waiting for corpses
that took two hundred
years to grow.

biologists predict the selkirk
caribou will “wink out” like city
lights during a black out.
like gamblers who have put down
their last bucks, we'll watch,
transfixed, as thirty
dwindle to zero. even stewards
concede it's not tenable
to close the forests
to snowmobiles, to stop logging.
they grasp what you and i may not:
someone, somewhere, did a calculation—

logging and recreation beat out
species preservation.

harvest

two weeks ago workers picked
budded daffodils, bound them into
bouquets, loaded them on trucks.
a few bunches fell in road-
side grass and lay there
conjuring all the wasted
treasures. now, i pass those same
bouquets again, flowers fully
opened, blooming at nothing.

half-life

home for the yearly visit in february
i sit with you in the rented car in the dirt
driveway that travels from one end
of the lot to the other. already
the house is so near to falling
down that you won't let me in and you
won't leave the half-acre yard for fear
that someone will break in. somewhere

beyond a daughter's jurisdiction, doctors
weave scientific labels through
the spokes of mystery. if i could read
about my mother in words indifferent as steel
instruments, would i feel more or less that i exist?

so far, the only names i know belong to the ones
you blame. *Chris Barns is writing a book about me—if he
calls you tell me. i get \$1,000 for every privacy
violation. i know you've talked to Mark Kraus; didn't
he call you yesterday? Harold Johns put him up
to trying to take my house away.* do you know what terror is?

imagine waking up near 30 to realize
your mother has always been insane
if you could reclaim the psyche, what
colors would you shade perception in?

the pictures i like best are black and whites of
a dark-haired girl in a pale dress. girl with a
doll, girl with a puppy. maryjanes with white socks
and a background of grass. her face turned slightly,
the girl half-smiles at the camera. it's that mixture
of willingness and caution i believed in

Events Leading up to an Afterlife Meeting Between Terri Schiavo and Manadal al-Jamadi

the woman who committed a kind of extended suicide
clings to life in a hospice, her feeding tube removed,
after state courts and federal courts
refused to intervene. fifteen years earlier, while the eating disorder
ravaged her, before it stopped her heart
and killed her brain, she might have been savable.

the president who flew home early from his texas ranch
to sign the legislation that gave the federal courts jurisdiction
to review the state court's life support decision
is the same man whose navy seals and CIA officers beat
an iraqi war prisoner near death with fists and gun muzzles,
then shackled him to the wall,
palestinian style, to die of complications.
Manadal al-Jamadi went from "ghost prisoner"
to ghost in less than an hour, a flexibility
that demonstrates the advantages
of "ghost prisoner" status.

and so a white woman in a self-induced
vegetative state, who didn't want to be on life support
but whom our government nonetheless
sought to forcibly keep alive, and an arab man,
taken prisoner by our country and immediately
murdered by our soldiers, both take off,
maybe to the same place, to face whatever's next,
leaving us with our silence.