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Summer Spoils

Mary Dengler

“All moves toward dissolution, death, decay!” I mutter
as I dodge encroaching waves on San Clemente Beach
since forced by pain to walk the miles
I’ve run the years before.

But scarcely have I reached my door
when handymen confirm
my half-felt claim.

“You’ve termites here!” says Steve—
a statement that confirms
the designated work of worms
within the scheme of things.
They chew the tree to crumbs that fall to ground
to feed the soil that feeds the trees.
“This house is not a tree,”
I tell the hiding swarms.

“Your water heater leaks,” says Mark.
“The sacrificial rod inside is eaten up by Calcium and Lime;
its entropy alerts the owners that their guarantee’s expired”—
“A little like my bones,” I grouse.

“The screen door’s stuck,” exclaims my spouse.
“Be careful not to pull it off its rusty track. And oh,
the front door’s swollen--doesn’t open, or
if opened, close: it doesn’t fit its frame.” Even so
I see my habits forming rusted tracks
and entryways made smaller by my arrogance and bulk.

“The plumbing down the hall is also shot, where
rooted vines have grown into the cracking pipes.”
As thoughts of “Thanatopsis” bring my mother’s bones—
now pierced and wrapped by silent roots—to mind,
I flee to stacks of letters from the week.

“Our lovely Jeanne is gone,” I read,
my friend of thirty years or more
now dead, surprisingly from cancer
while she ranged Alzheimer’s empty halls;
without her book reviews and city wit,
her calls and notes had tapered off to none
Till she was gone for good.

Still, stunned by my neglect of her decline
and her escape,
I open up another from my stack.

“Our Ben will have an MRI
this week,” it says.
“A tumor blocks his vision till removed.”
Disheartened that a six-years’ hunter meets his nemesis
so soon, I seek my porch
and weathered salt-stripped chair
to push away the sufferings
there that nearly stop the heart
with fright.

As sails beyond my neighbors’ crumbling roof
join endless sea and boundless sky in one tight seam,
two local cats recline between me and my potted jade
repairing from their nightly kill
of bird or squirrel or mouse, whose corpses feed
the verdure that destroys my house.

Before the day wears out,
construction crews like surgeons fence our street.
Jack-hammers break cement of fifty years and fling it to the side
while pipes are jammed in softened ground
to carry fluids to and from a birthing high-rise up the hill.
The weeks before, this crew had euthanized and leveled “Doggie Park,”
a wide expanse along the bluff
where dogs and owners ran without a sound
beyond a random shout or windy bark in silence,
stunned by waves that broke and crashed along the shore below.
All gone, our common holy mound.

As rockets crash through Israel,
who aims its missiles back at Hezbollah,
ensconced within a host of schools and mosques in Lebanon,
old Eric buries Jeanne,
and six-years’ Ben begins his journey through an MRI.
I pour my guests a glass of wine to celebrate
another sunset and another day along the plain
of our eternal life.