

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 entrail streamer in her beak, the happy cannibal. I say, let's hear it for the orchestra of sparrows nesting under every eave.