

Three Micros

by Dianne McKnight-Warren

This Thing Keeps Moving On Me

A wet hen with a crossed beak—a hen that had to peck at a grub too many damn times for it to be worth it—that's how I thought of her. When she saw me, if she couldn't think of anything bad to say, she'd ask me a question like “Are you...?” or “Did you...?” with a scolding at the end right next to the mark.

Once my mother told me a story about a chicken with a crossed beak, how it ate out of her hand when she was little. I don't think it was an angry chicken, just a pitiful one. It lived because of her. I asked her what happened to it and she said, “Oh, you know...” her words trailing off. I knew before I asked I shouldn't.

Ants

I asked the hospice nurse about maggots. Once I had a hospice dog who had three maggots crawling on him. They were born on a crumb of poo, a pinhead-size crumb of poo. The maggots were on it fast like, well, like flies on shit. The hospice nurse said she'd never seen maggots, but she'd seen ants.

Did she pull back the covers and find ants setting up house in someone's abdomen? I didn't ask but that's what I imagined. That's why I don't feel bad about squirting ants with vinegar.

This summer I've squirted hundreds. When ants go back to the nest smelling like vinegar the other ants shun them, a you-are-worse-than-dead-to-me shun. If you were merely dead I'd carry you to a proper burial no matter how far away it was. Even if you were twice my length, even if your thorax was bigger than my head, I'd carry you to a tomb and stack you carefully among the others. I'd rearrange all of them to make a special place for you. I'd tend to you, move you and the others around according to a cosmic plan only ants comprehend. We tend to our dead. Tend to them! Nothing can deter us. Except for vinegar.

Vinegar makes us nuts. But not so nuts that I would forget to shun you.

“Holiday Inn Nighttime”

At twelve I already liked night better than day and hearing the word “nighttime” over and over seduced me deeper. Anything could be hiding out there in the dark and those songs told secrets.

I kept my transistor radio warm in the crook of my neck. I'd cup my hand over the dial to protect the exact sweet spot I'd found. Any touch could change everything, interrupt the signals coming from miles away.

I remember one night I heard “Harbor Lights” all the way from Chicago, the signal fading in and out like stitching, a thread held in the eye of a needle.

