



## Gravel Literary Journal: April 2018 issue

### Katydid

*Michael Royce*

Katydid, I'm sorry. I didn't notice you at the bottom of the casement window I cranked shut before leaving the cabin yesterday. And I wouldn't have seen you when I returned except for the need to clean the glass of excreta sprayed across its surface by some wayward bird.

While wiping vigorously to erase the glop with a concentrated non-toxic, all-purpose, biodegradable cleaner, I discover you, still alive, abdomen crushed where the gasket pinched. The remainder of your body extends at a right angle with its color changed from leaf green to brown. You look in a bad way. Unsure what to do, I rush inside to release you.

When I return outdoors to see how you fare in restored freedom, I conclude you are soon to die. Yet, as I brush you to the ground (gingerly because of your fearsome pinchers), you wriggle. An unwitting force of destruction, I will let life take its course.

Even deformed you remain impressive: almost three inches from deflated stomach to the top of your

head, not counting for antennae filaments longer than your body. I surmise you are male, though you are clearly not in a mood to conduct a stridulating orchestra by drawing the bow of one forewing against the other.

Stridulation, like ululation, evinces a satisfying onomatopoetic ring, I believe, before digressing to the less dignified thought that your testes comprise fourteen per cent of your body weight. That seems enough to throw you off balance as you search for the varied vegetations of your diet, which reminds me we live beside a wheat field. I am sure the farmer would not find you as charming as I do, and death from insecticide cannot be gentler than a slow lethal squeeze. But anyway, I desert you to your fate.

As I lie down to nap later that day, my mind remains awake. How are you doing? After a fruitless half-hour, I rise and trudge outside with a certainty you will be gone, though not flown away: surely one of the finches, meadowlarks and bluebirds flitting about have found you delicious. But there you are, fading and motionless where you dropped. I reach to touch you and you move feebly, legs clawing at the ground to obtain some purchase. Lifting you on a sheet of paper to observe better (and, well, not to be bitten), I realize your coloration no longer provides protective mimicry but heralds impending death.

I'm sorry, Katydid. I did you no good. I will lay you out among the flowers and grasses by the small ponderosa. And wonder how, Jain-like, I might live in this world without harm to other species. Perhaps also, tonight in a nightmare I will imagine a creature doing to me what I have done to you.