

MICHELLE ROSQUILLO

Monocarp

Days and even hours before I run gentle fingers
 down my cat's unbroken spine
 for the last time, I kneel to bury them
knuckle-deep in damp soil, yank at knotted cords
 of rhizome braided beneath. Every garden maven decries
 what's weed and what's worthy, how not always
color and scent constitute beauty; the struggle
 to sow life wars with life's struggle to sow itself
 in every unattended space.

I let the apple mint grow wild this winter; the strawberry too.
 Now they flourish with the return of spring,
 runners cross-hatching through oregano, oxalis, sage.

Advice says not to grow the two together—the rot that cripples
 one will devastate the other through proximity alone—
 but I couldn't resist pairing the sweet fruit with soft bite.

I coax unwanted stalks from earth with the same care used to unroot
 stubborn claws from clothing: fingers seeking the yield
 though I admire the tenacity of a small life tangled
in what it loves. Carpenter bees hover defensively
 around tiny sorrel blossoms, dart at my hands
 when I move closer to their prize,
but I don't flinch and they fall back. They're males
 who harry any imagined threat but cannot sting,
 only mark displeasure with sound and fury. My wife
laughs and says, *Like your son*. I don't recall until after the accident
 that the brain holds onto bad memories best,
 to protect with pain against future pain. I can't numb

RED ROCK REVIEW

the incessant buzz: dull slap of fur and bone
 against hardwood, the eerie silence
 with which shock blankets trauma, the body's
visceral rejection of itself, first the heart's
 surrender then the lungs, eyes
 blight-stricken with fatal wilt.
Discarded lore demands we tell the bees
 of death, let them hold vigil for the lost,
 but how to speak what barely feels
true? Instead I need them to tell me, Remember
 light falling silver on his left side, remember his want
 to be wild and still be loved. Remember midnight
cries signaling nothing or loneliness, or hunger, or some desire
 to test the depth of the dark. But they can't say—
 no, I can't ask them to bear the full weight of human
sentiment. It's enough that they harbor our grief—swift gravity
 pulling the sun beneath the upturned ground
 where our hands seize what clings to life.