

The Difference Between Fiction and Life

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I watch the struggles of a moth trapped in an abandoned spider web. It flutters without resting. August sun bakes the air. What is thirst to a moth? In the geometry of the tall window, the length of my arms, and the spare furnishings of my borrowed room, I see no way to free it. Perhaps in a closet somewhere, I would find a broom. I don't look for one. I watch.

What is waste? What is a moth uneaten by the absent spider?

I think of a tiny corpse, whole nations of bacteria, rich soil. But a new character, more urgent than the sun, enters the story. A yellowjacket flies erratic orbits, spiraling in. Each time the hunter closes with its prey, the moth wings buzz. The yellow jacket goes away. The moth flutters. When the yellow jacket returns, flies tight circles, tries to land, the moth wings buzz again. The yellow jacket flies off. When it re-enters the scene — as if insects knew that stories come in threes — it finally alights between the fluttering exhausted wings and clutches the moth.

They are one dark silhouette together in a corner of bright sky. Does the hunter sting? Does the moth die? Their weights combined break the web, and their tiny bodies fall the length of the window, straight down. The web holds only a fragment of wing.

I hurry down the stairway, outside, around the corner of the house. I stand where gravity alone would have drawn them. I search the grass, the bare earth, but the end of the story is not here for me to find.