



VANISHING *Mezzotints by Holly Downing | Poems by Jane Hirshfield*

GAZELLE & GOAT PRESS

*“The more clearly we can
focus our attention
on the wonders and realities
of the universe about us,
the less taste we shall have
for destruction.”*

— Rachel Carson



Heart Starting and Stopping in the Late Dark

I cannot tell
if this night singing comes
from inside or outside the house,
though today a cricket walked
across my papers on the floor.
He made a little clicking sound
as he passed, from his strange knees,
or his feet on the paper.
He seemed to know where he wanted to get to.
When the dying Bonnard had his nephew
add the new yellow-gold to *Almond in Blossom*,
it was his signature he canceled for that other.
This late typing, starting and stopping,
is not so different from a cricket's walking
to the night's ear, I think—
if the night had an ear. Perhaps that is what
started him singing, wherever he is,
startled by my insomnia into his one word,
which is filled, I think, with dignity,
which is filled, I think, with trust.
I would like to go, as at last Bonnard did,
all the way into the world of the living.
To sit there a while in the petals, altering nothing.

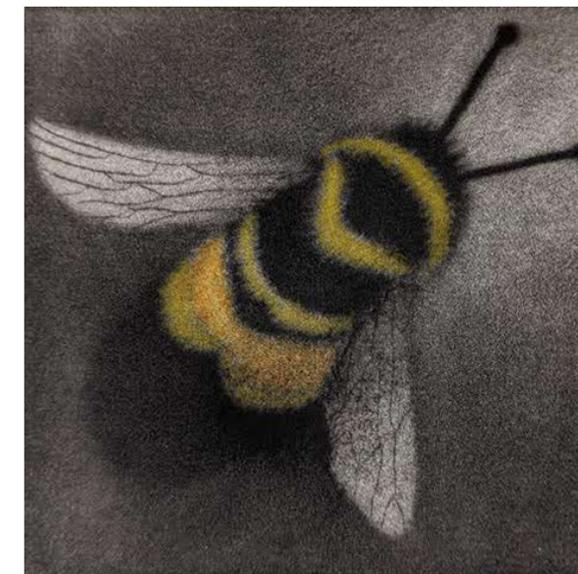


Bees

In every instant, two gates.
One opens to fragrant paradise, one to hell.
Mostly we go through neither.

Mostly we nod to our neighbor,
lean down to pick up the paper,
go back into the house.

But the faint cries—ecstasy? horror?
Or did you think it the sound
of distant bees,
making only the thick honey of this good life?





Downed Branch

I wanted to be intimate to my own life.
What came were
the many eating their way through the tree.

Night of no wind, the grass littered with unripe apples.
The limb fell hard.

It was not
the weight of the apples but the many eating,
even on the ground still eating,
anonymous and steady.

Someone else could name them, genus, species.
Someone else could feel for them affection.

I wanted the intimate knowledge
they had of the tree.
Wanted their simple, almost weightless, and ruinous hunger
made without distinction of the lived-in tree.



Love in August

White moths
against the screen
in August darkness.

Some clamor
in envy.

Some spread large
as two hands
of a thief

who wants to put
back in your cupboard
the long-taken silver.





Rock

What appears to be stubbornness,
refusal, or interruption,
is to it a simple privacy. It broods
its one thought like a quail her clutch of eggs.

Mosses and lichens
listen outside the locked door.
Stars turn the length of one winter, then the next.

Rocks fill their own shadows without hesitation,
and do not question silence,
however long.
Nor are they discomforted by cold, by rain, by heat.

The work of a rock is to ponder whatever is:
an act that looks singly like prayer,
but is not prayer.

As for this boulder,
its meditations are slow but complete.

Someday, its thinking worn out, it will be
carried away by an ant.

A Mystrium camillae,
perhaps, caught in some equally diligent,
equally single pursuit of a thought of her own.



Ghazal for the End of Time

(after Messiaen)

Break anything – a window, a piecrust, a glacier – it will break open.
A voice cannot speak, cannot sing, without lips, teeth, *lamina propria* coming open.

Some breakage can barely be named, hardly be spoken.
Rains stopped, roof said. Fires, forests, cities, cellars peeled open.

Tears stopped, eyes said. An unhearable music fell instead from them.
A clarinet stripped of its breathing, the cello abandoned.

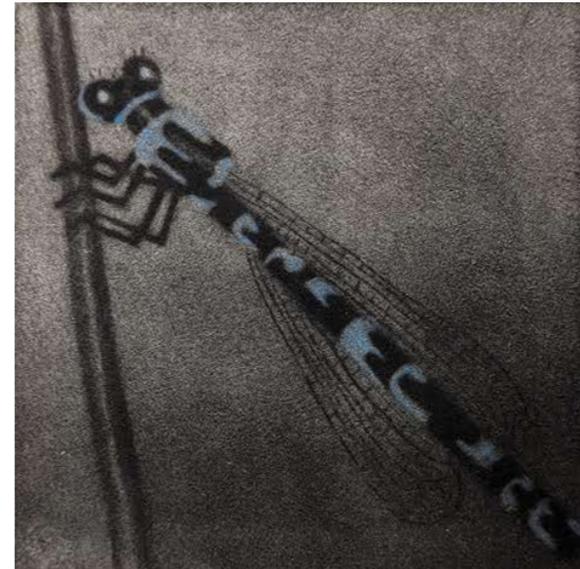
The violin grieving, a hand too long empty held open.
The imperial piano, its 89th, 90th, 91st strings unsummoned, unawakened.

Watching, listening, was like that: the low, wordless humming of being unwoven.
Fish vanished. Bees vanished. Bats whitened, Arctic ice opened.

Hands wanted more time, hands thought we had time. Spending time's rivers,
its meadows, its mountains, its instruments tuning their silence, its deep mantle broken.

Earth stumbled within and outside us.
Orca, thistle, kestrel withheld their instruction.

Rock said, Burning Ones, pry your own blindness open.
Death said, Now I too am orphan.



Specimen Descriptions

Each of the insects featured in *Vanishing* is considered threatened or endangered, and they are all part of the “insect apocalypse.” Threats to their survival include habitat loss and fragmentation, invasion of non-native species, pesticide application and drift, and global warming. They are listed here in order of appearance in *Vanishing*:

Monarch Butterfly, Danaus plexippus

One of the most recognizable and well-studied butterflies on the planet, the Monarch, which requires milkweed on which to lay its eggs and feed its caterpillars, has been in sharp decline for some years. Some populations have a remarkable migration from Mexico to the U.S. east and west coasts. A multi-state conservation plan was established in 2020, and the Monarch is considered a candidate for the federally endangered species list.

Red-Winged Grasshopper, Oedipoda germanica

Found in south and central Europe, the Red-winged Grasshopper has remarkable red wings and round bulbous eyes. It is found mostly on rocky terrain where its gray-brown body — seen when the wings are closed — provides excellent camouflage. Its red wings, which deter predators, are only visible during a large, hovering jump. It has been studied extensively in Germany, where it is threatened with extinction.

Delta Green Ground Beetle, Elaphrus viridis

The Delta Green is a tiny ground beetle adorned with an opulent, metallic, emerald-green hue. It is restricted to a ten square mile wetland habitat in the Jepson Prairie in Solono County, Central California. Much of its habitat has been disturbed by agricultural development and it is now considered critically endangered.

Rusty Patched Bumblebee, Bombus affinis

The Rusty Patched Bumblebee, a keystone species, once occupied the grasslands and tall grass prairies of the upper Midwest and Northeast, and into southern Canada. But most grasslands and prairies have been lost, degraded, or fragmented by conversion to other uses, and so the bees have lost their habitats. Several service agencies are working to recover this endangered species, along with other pollinators.

Stag Beetle, Lucanus cervus

One of the largest and most spectacular insects in the U.K., the male Stag Beetle, with its huge antler-like mandibles, can be three inches long. These beetles live primarily underground, feeding their larvae on rotting wood. They are listed as endangered in the U.K.

Bay Checkerspot Butterfly, Euphydryas editha bayensis

The striking Bay Checkerspot is a butterfly endemic to the San Francisco Bay Area, and is federally threatened. The caterpillars eat only dwarf plantain and purple owl's clover, both of which grow only in serpentine soils, which are high in magnesium and heavy metals, and low in nutrients such as nitrogen. Increased carbon dioxide from traffic has altered the soils these plants depend upon.

Hawaiian Green Sphinx Moth, Tinostoma smaragditis

Endemic to the Hawaiian Islands, the Sphinx Moth was thought to be extinct until it was rediscovered in 1998. Still considered endangered, the moths live in dry forests and lowland moist forests.

American Burying Beetle, Nicrophorus americanus

One of nature's most efficient and fascinating recyclers, the male American Burying Beetle finds a small dead animal, then attracts a mate. Together they bury the carcass and wrap it with secretions for future food for their larvae, which they rear together, underground. Once well-known in the Midwest for its striking, distinctive coloring, it has become rare and was declared federally endangered in 1989.

Smith's Blue Butterfly, Euphilotes enoptes smithi

The Smith's Blue is a tiny, bright blue butterfly with a wingspan of less than one inch. It spends its whole life within a few hundred yards of two native plants - seacliff buckwheat and coast buckwheat, along an 80-mile stretch of coastal sand dunes in Monterey, San Mateo, and Santa Cruz counties. Smith's Blue was placed on the endangered species list in 1976, when its native habitat started to disappear due to development and invasive non-native plants like ice plant.

Southern Damselfly, Coenagrion mercuriale

The stunning Southern Damselfly is considered threatened in Europe and the U.K. It habituated in heathlands and water meadows in continental flood plains. The sharp decline in the species' numbers is due to the removal of grazing animals that maintain the open nature of the species' breeding sites, drainage due to agriculture and forestry, and nutrient runoff from nearby agricultural activities.

Valley Elderberry Longhorn Beetle, Desmocerus californicus dimorphus

Native to the riparian forests of the Central Valley of California, from Redding to Bakersfield, this species is nearly always found on, or close to, its host plant, elderberry. It is a federally listed threatened species due to removal of riparian vegetation for agricultural conversion, grazing, levee construction, and non-native animals like the Argentine ant which eats the beetle's larvae.



Colophon

Vanishing is a collaboration between Holly Downing of Sebastopol and Rhiannon Alpers in San Francisco, California. Holly made and hand-colored the mezzotint engravings, while Rhiannon designed, letterpress printed, and bound the edition. Holly was assisted in the editioning by Toni Stirling.

The papers are Rives BFK from France, Arjowiggins Kea Colour Vellum Sombre Grey, and a handmade cotton rag paper that was created by Rhiannon Alpers for the edition. The enclosure is a drop spine magnet box with a museum glass panel in Dubletta bookcloth.

Jane Hirshfield's poems first appeared in the following books: "Heart Starting and Stopping in the Late Dark," from *The Lives of the Heart* (NY: HarperCollins, 1997); "Bees," from *The Lives of the Heart* (NY: HarperCollins, 1997); "Downed Branch," from *After* (NY: HarperCollins, 2006); "Love in August," from *Come, Thief* (NY: Knopf, 2011); "Rock," from *Given Sugar, Given Salt* (NY: HarperCollins, 2001); "Ghazal for the End of Time," from *Ledger* (NY: Knopf, 2020).

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Produced in an edition of twenty copies, with six additional artist's copies which are not for sale.

This is edition number _____.