

OCTOGENARIAN ON FIRE, 2018

- *Vilma Ginzberg*

From Section 3, Living in an elding body:

LAST TRY

it was the fineness of his flailing
which first caught my eye
those barely noticeable motions
and then
the fact that he was on his back
a position not, I guessed, taken for sport
that held my curiosity

larger than fly, not bee, finer-bodied than wasp
some winged six-legged cousin
clearly in distress
legs reaching sideways or akimbo
grabbing at the concrete surface under him
struggling to right himself
he slides in sideways circles on his back instead

looking closer
I see his hind left leg dragging
not just useless to lift him in one direction
or support him in the other
but now an obstacle

just out of his reach lay a dry shred of leaf
playing breeze, I move it closer to him
a casual life buoy meant to help him save himself

though he struggles
it does not help him to his feet

now on the inescapable path of rescue
I offer him, more deliberately, the shard of leaf
his long bent stick-legs grab it
together we right him

he is weak, unsteady on his five feet
and barely moves a hair or two along
before stumbling to rest
his head not aloft but bent to earth
his sixth leg dragging
his five others feeble
his wings without power
in slow motion he drifts onto his side
still, but for tiny jerking motions
of his long jointed legs

I try to read his face if he has one
and wonder if he seeks comfort ... or readies to die

I am now become hospice
watch him carefully for signs of life:
now and then a gasp or shiver
miniscule movements

I imagine the tiny shudders are his life's last
and wonder if he hurts
and rue I have not the wherewithal
to ease insect pain

my previously unattached curiosity
is now confronted by my compassion
merciful euthanasia comes to mind
I could do it quick and easy
with the slightest stomp

but when is the right time?

seeking clues from his body language

I remain unsure
how can I tell what is best for him?
how could I know his desire
 if he had one?
should I just let nature, as they say,
 take its course?
or should I put him out of his misery,
 if it is that?

I have become ineffably bound to him
this nameless once-soaring insect wonder
now tottering on the cusp
hymenoptera and mammal
I am he and he is me

in the long and shaky silence of uncertainty
together we face the mystery