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A Big Dangerous Something

The windows in the house are all clamped shut
Against the nostril-burning, paint thinner wretch of sucker control.
The men in the neighbor's field dressed in white bio suits
Fitted teal gloves, white masks
Meandering around the broad tobacco leaves like a squadron
Of lost surgeons searching for the frail, sick bodies
They need to work their healing.
I take a cold cheeseburger, left over from the 4th of July
Out of the fridge and eat it with onions and pickles
On a soft, egg washed bun and feel trapped
Even though it's overcast and I hadn't wanted to go outside anyway.
I can feel the insects in the backyard taking to ground
Wriggling back into the safety of deep dirt.
When I was employed by one of these old tobacco farms for a summer
I was sent one afternoon to pick up a worker who had been accidentally left
Alone and unaware on the edge of town
In a field that was about to be doused in pesticide from a plane.
I raced across the narrow country roads in the lurching pickup
Fishtailing and leaning on the horn with the whole length of my arm.
I rocketed down the rough dirt path that wound through
That back forty and I thought I might flip the damn truck
Bucking as it was, like a bronco
My tailbone smacking down on the hard seat
Stones banging the undercarriage and suddenly the man appeared
Running as if out of a portal from underneath the white tent cloth
Smacking the tremendous green leaves out of his face.
I threw open the passenger door.
He jumped inside just as the plane descended on its first low arc.
In a panic of reflex he locked the door.

I didn't know this man from Adam but
I grabbed his forearm and he let me.
The veins in his arms were thick with the heat
Of hours of tightening the loosened tent pins above his head.
We watched together, silent
Ensconced in the safe ball of the truck's cab
Holding onto each other awkwardly like a couple on a first date
As the plane flew in low again and again
Releasing its payload in neat, practiced columns.
We sat in the vortex of that wet death from above
Marveling at the simple ease of it, as innocuous looking
As a fine mist of water—
A suburban sprinkler on a patchy lawn, tired parents gripping
Golden beers and children's dripping hair shining in the sun
Or a cool summer shower after a sunburn, scent of coconut and lime
An evening of watching game shows, fan on high, pulling a loose
Sundress away from pinching skin.
We sat in the middle of it, a big dangerous something
That looked like absolutely nothing
And that day, in my life, was a day for the books.
That day I found, stumbling around, impossibly, a body under the leaves
And I worked my healing magic.
It was not supposed to happen
There were no years of training
No grace or valor to it
But I saved a man.
That day I earned the good oxygen of the breath I took in
And the Earth forgave me
For walking the way I did back then, cold and sometimes hateful
Across her beautiful face.