

The Green Insect

I had a green insect, a kind that had never before been seen,
descendant of an ancient nation, regal, rigid in ritual.

It would sun itself on my windowsill, stretching its legs one by one,
its hinged joints, its swivel joints, its claws,
unfolding and folding its Swiss army knife implements.
It was ready for a landing on the moon.

Around my page it marched itself like a colour guard.
It halted, and its segments fell into place, jolting all down the line.

It uncased its wings, which glistened the way sometimes very old
things glisten: tortoiseshell fans, black veils, lantern glass.
It was a plant with a will, an independent plant, an early invention
wiser than what we've arrived at now.
It was a brain coiled in amulets for whom nature is all hieroglyphs.

People gawked. A woman pointed a camera. I hesitated, but –
I did – I held the insect up its long back legs, like a badge,
like my accomplishment.

The air flashed, the insect twisted and fought, breaking its legs in
my fingertips, hung

lunging, fettered with stems of grass,
and I laid it gently down on a clean page,
but it wanted no convalescence,
it ripped up reality, it flung away time and space,
I couldn't believe the strength it had,

it unwound its history, ran out its spring in kicks and rage, denied
itself, denied me and my ownership, fizzed, shrank, took
off in wave after wave of murder, and left nothing but this
page faintly stained with green.