

The Yard

Ken Sparling

I sit in the backyard.

It's morning.

I've got my earbuds in.

The weather is cool.

I pick up my mug.

Sip coffee.

It's a little burnt.

Tastes bitter.

I take out the earbuds.

It's quiet.

I hear birds.

A good use of my time,
I have decided,
is attending what we have come to describe
as the apartment readings
at Babak and Sara's place.
How it works is, Babak invites a group
of five or six writers
to come to his apartment
on a given Sunday evening
and a bunch of us come to listen
to these writers read
from their work.
It's intimate,
everybody says.

There is this one particular robin — at least, I think it is always the same robin; they all kind of look the same to me, but I like to fancy that I can identify this particular robin by her demeanour (I'm pretty sure she is a female), and so set her apart from the other robins who live in the neighbourhood — anyway, this particular robin always lands on the back fence while I am sitting out in the yard. She likes to watch me for a time, tipping her head one way and then the other, and if I stay relatively still — which I generally do because I am usually just reading — she will eventually hop down onto our tiny lawn to hunt for worms.

I ALWAYS SIT IN A GRAVITY CHAIR
WITH A HEATING PAD ON MY BACK
WHEN I'M OUT IN THE YARD.

It was the 26th of May and I'd come out early because the weather forecast was calling for it to warm up, not to any level of discomfort, but to the point where the temperature would be above the level I considered ideal for sitting out. After my friend the robin had come and gone, a squirrel stopped by. It sat on the fence and stared at me. It sat there staring at me for such a long time that I became uncomfortable. I tried to carry on reading as though the

squirrel wasn't there, as though nothing was out of the ordinary, but I couldn't do it. Finally, after trying to outstare the squirrel for a time, I banged my fist down on the patio table where I had my coffee. The squirrel gave a little start, but didn't move. I bashed my fist down a second time, a little harder. The brazen little beast didn't even seem to register it this time. "What do you want?" I called out. Still the creature remained. I took

a sip of my coffee. Finally the squirrel moved. It skittered a foot or two along the fence, then looked at me, settling down onto the fence in a little patch of sun that was coming into the yard from between the big trees that grow out back. I again tried to read. I read the same sentence four times. When I looked up from my book, the squirrel was gone.

So, what I'm asking here - what I want to know, is: Is there a way to resist the grammar of time? If not as an individual, then maybe as an organized collective? Also: Is pain a trap, or is it simply a place in your lower back that is wearing out? Is this pain I feel all the time something solid, like a space that won't yield to time? Or is it more akin to solitary confinement? Or like getting thrown into the river in a pair of concrete galoshes?