

EVOLUTION

I had written three pages
on how insects are such good chemists, citing
the silkworm sex attractant,
and the bombardier beetle, spraying out
hot hydrogen peroxide when threatened.
And I was in the middle
of telling the story of the western pine beetle,
which has an aggregation pheromone
calling all comers (of that species).
The pheromone has three components:
one from the male, frontalin,
exo-brevicommin wafted by the female
and (ingenious) abundant
pitch-smelling myrcene
from the host pine.
I had written this the night before,
broken it down into short lines.
When I woke up Sunday and sat down to work,
quietly, with a second cup of coffee,
the sun was on my desk.
I had some flowers I had picked on the hill
in a vase: bush lupine, California poppies,
and some of the grass that grows here.
On the grass stalks the bracts were a few centimeters apart.
They were beige, finely lined husks,
their line set by a dark spikelet,
more like a stiffened flagellum than a thorn.
A hint of something feathered inside.
The sun's warmth had burst some of the pods,
which had fallen on the draft
(the words were lost in the sun), fallen
by chance next to the shadows of seed still hanging, and,
the grass seed
like dormant grasshoppers,
legs of now bent spikelets
cast second, finer shadows.
Then I saw you walking on the hill.