

THE HUNT

For one long summer the dog and cat,
free in the predictable wilderness
of Long Island in 1973,
met in a toe-to-toe grudge match
hunting the moles
that had been digging a hidden city
under our yard,
leaving hollow hills, dead grass,
my mother wishing she had
the heart to buy poison.
As featureless and newborn
as tadpoles, yet grown
and hardened by clay,
they belonged in a world of their own:
single blind muscles
outfitted only for digging ahead
in the darkness.
Once the competition started
I kept score, which
ran even for weeks,
the moles caught whenever they
dug too close to the air
and made the grass move
in a watery throb.
Usually if the cat caught them, they were killed.
The dog, however,
batted them gently over the dandelions
like the tennis balls she'd
chewed all tension from.
I preferred the dog's way, of course,
though by August the corpses
outnumbered the orphans 3 to 1.
I remember lifting the live moles
up from the grass,
their groping, babyish bodies,
unborn snouts, closed eyes,

the huge claws I scrupulously avoided,
rolling them into coffee cans
and taking the walk deep
into the neighboring woods.
They'd scratch the aluminum
the whole way, wondering
what new dirt
wouldn't move from before them.
I felt quite like a father,
a life-giver,
bringing the lost, the blind
into the new worlds,
where they may dig in any direction,
and calmly smell the sky.

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