

MOTH AND RAT

Moth and rat
both gnawed holes in what was,
desperate appetite

that left
all garments holey. Moth and rat
knew no limit, would not

make a split
between
the dainty and the container

meant to contain it.
Sweat, blood,
cashmere, vicuna, alpaca,

fine Italian wool--
omnivorous and multicultural
were moth and rat.

If you would steel
yourself against incursion
tooth and claw, bore and bezel—

if you would live
as metal, robot skin
impervious to dust or fission,

well, you must find
that route alone.
Even bone's permeable

and my skin
pitted with beings
trying to get out or in,

leaving their stingers, cursed,
blessed, in my flesh
till I am dressed

in the milkweed cloth
they have left me,
tit for tat:

sucking my sweetness
as I sucked the fat
dew and honey, the sap,

grass blades
where the sky showed through.
Filigree's my map.

And what they did to me
I can do for you—
rat and moth, moth and rat.

IN CANA

The Lebanese spelled it with a q, without the u.
Qana. That town where John said Jesus at a wedding
turned water into wine. The other gospels missed it.
They caught other miracles, but they missed that first miracle.
The guest said "You're not like the others, who just serve good
wine till we're drunk." Later Jesus said "I bring not peace but the sword."

But in that first miracle, there was nothing of sword.
It's important you understand this, you
apocalyptic idiots, Muslim, Christian, and Jew. A good
party, that was all-- people dancing those wedding
dances, lifting a chair, like they still do, a miracle
they can get it up there without dropping it,

or, if they do drop it, without killing whoever's in it.
But it's family they love there, so if they do a sword
dance, it's just clacking them together like the Morris men, minor miracle
of coordination. At the Revels, they clacked so hard--you
should have seen!--they broke the blade. At a wedding,
that would probably be bad luck. It might be good

to leave the swords out of it for good.
That's a disarmament proposal, what do you think of it?
What if we acted as if the whole world were a wedding
with good wine till the end? What if you left your sword
at the door and never retrieved it? And you
just kept dancing and drinking all night, like that first miracle

and the wine never got less good--that would be a miracle.
You know I'm not just talking about the wine being good.
I'm writing a little parable or a sermon for you.
Yes, a dead prophet is not the only one who can do it.
I'm saying we've seen what comes of bringing the sword.
Now let's bring a covered dish, and get back to the wedding.

I like to think that maybe it's a wedding
of people from different sides, ordinary miracle--
two black-browed lovers, aflame like a flowering swords.
Gladiola. Bird of paradise. What looks like a knife-edge sheathe till it
unfurls in good
blossom. The angels each holding a stem of it
at the door of the fiery world, and they beckon to you.

They hold the flaming sword to protect the wedding,
and they want to include you in this miracle.
Not blood, but good wine that pours. Let us dream of it.

Published in *Colorado Review* and versedaily.org
Monica Raymond 2006

HARDSHIP

for Phyllis Capello

In her digital camera, jewel box,
she shows me the stills of her life:
exquisite miniatures set in a silver frame,

appearing from blackness, miraculous
as lantern slides once must have seemed
in a dark room: Yosemite, Venice--

cliffs, gondoliers strumming the turbid waters,
poling in striped jerseys like barber poles,
red striped for bleeding, healing—

her husband, graybeard sexy; her grown son
dark limbs catlike moving across the frame;
her best friend, gapped blond bangs and toothy grin;

her kitchen, the soft red of Tuscan earth,
“like a Vermeer,” she says; foreground her foot
and the shy-looking Tibetan pedicurist who tends it.

She says she thinks my life is one of hardship.
It’s true, it is, hard texts, hard tack,
the hard berth on the floor and the rock

of poverty. Not something I really chose
but what chose me. What could I show? No husband, children,
no sweet kitchen, bowl full of russet fruits--

Maybe the back yard wild with volunteer
asters, one week a year, their starry faces
petitioning night sky, over and over, legions

believing and dying? “And it does nothing, changes nothing—“
she adds. Maybe the white pickets askew
in early morning, bashed from their upright stance

by the night revelers, moth holes in my vests,
rat holes in my undies? Maybe the infinite and brisk
billet of cold, water rock hard in jugs, frisk of snow on my eyebrows?

When does neurosis become destiny, the peeling free
of hearth and home, of known beloveds, become
mendicant journey, wandering in place? Face it,

every human life has its hardship. But this
is something different, more a taste--for tusk
over trunk, sharp symmetry of fishbone

over filet, the owl's cry above the fluted rhapsody
of songbird, skeletal tap dance, known
bunion fading to bone on stone. Click in—you know

the rhythm. My body with its glistening
organs, tough meat of heart, the fat
liver, twin bloody fists of kidney, *I'm*

what I've got, that none but emergency
may pry from me, yet still I deal myself the slippery
sloshed deck of HARDSHIP, bailing feverishly;

dream myself hollow limb of a fruitwood tree
blown by some occult whistler, probably
just his apprentice, embouchure one sloppy kiss

tonguing the same practice notes over and over.
Over, over, till dawn. When will--some night--will he
(I for that matter) move to melody?

Maybe this is it. This melody. This night.
Did I relinquish ordinary bliss
for syllable, long somewhere in the soul black mountains?

Some straw-to-gold old bargain, reckless
what's-behind-the-churchyard trade,
where I gave what I never had

to limn, let's say, meadow grass: *brittle, thin, tawny*
underlaid with grayed green, seed heads crisp in wind,
thrum of vibration, drum skin of whisker—

ramble, preamble, bramble, like some street coot
loose as a goose on moonshine or Listerine—
that's what I got from being up tight to the mast, hard past

siren suburbia, or hell, even the Village, this fast track
to incoherence sin to sin skin to skin *poe to pu pu to pa to poetry*
and as long as I'm in the neighborhood, you might as well tattoo me

blue as a Druid, I'll take prophecy and the fake beard lines,
wait in the piney woods, one silent bole still awake
and sworn not to yield to the Romans. That's where hardship

takes me. So, though it leaves its splintery
tines in my body, I won't quit it soon. I can't believe
I'm signing on again to this ramshackle

plan of no plan, this vessel that rides me further
from the jewel tones of haven, home, loved ones,
their maddening quirks and wounds, gold flowers, zinnias?

in kitchen alcoves. Though I'm ironic, even at times aghast
at what domestic life seems to require,
I find I show appropriate reverence at docks and coves.

I need some sense of the horizon:
its rose flush, gray pallor, how it shows itself, hiding
no rift, almost as if it were an eye that cannot close.

It keeps me at a distance--meet for those
with no defined companion, woman or man—
brides to the faint bright world.