***\* Fabulous Beasts \****



***Arthur Chapin***

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***The Tufted Puffin***

A tufted puffin, on the Island of Baffin,

Once saw a man eating a toasted muffin.

“How strange,” thought the puffin, “to see a man

Eat a toasted muffin on the Island of Baffin!”

But friends! That timorous tufted puffin

Was hungry, and desired that muffin.

And so, with a tentative, worried look

(The customary look of the tufted puffin),

He slowly approaches the man with the muffin.

(A tufted puffin, you see, doesn’t often

Encounter a muffin or a man.)

“Please, sir,” he asks, shyly eyeing the muffin,

“I know I’m…just a…tufted…puffin,

But might I have some toasted…muffin?

“Some toasted muffin, did you say?”

Blusters the man. “You’re a *tufted puffin!*

“What? Give you a piece of toasted muffin?

I’d just as soon dine on roasted puffin!”

He thunders, and frightens the bashful bird,

Who wishes he’d never set eyes on that muffin,

Toasted or cold. He goes fluttering off in

A sputtering funk, the poor flustered puffin,

Off from his perch on Baffin Rock

(A place to which puffins repair rather often),

And now he is far out at sea, out at sea!

Where the wind-battered waves toss furiously.

Ah! Pity that ruffled, buffeted puffin,

Lashed by the wind and the spray of the sea!

“I wish I had never laid eyes on that muffin!

I’d be back on my perch, where a tufted puffin

Belongs, somewhat hungry, it’s true, but safe

And dry—though bereft, indeed, of a muffin,

Toasted or cold. It’s unlikely to soften,

The heart of that hard-hearted man with the muffin.

I suspect it’s as hard as Baffin Rock,

Which water and wind will never soften.

But wait! After all, I’m a TUFTED PUFFIN,

With a gullet to cram fish and other foodstuff in,

And wings as well. Suppose I just

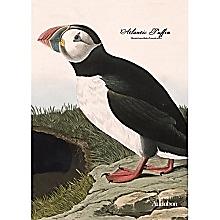
Swoop down on the man, like a dive-bombing puffin,

And simply make off with that toasted muffin?”

Which he did.—And the man, who had more than enough in

His two hands to feed both himself and the puffin,

Ended up with—and this is the moral—…*nuffin*.



***Chicken***

Scratching the ground

As if earth had an itch,

With gallinaceous twitch

It bickers around

Its feeding place—

So busy, not in the least

Like those great birds who feast

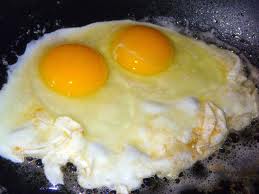
On gulps of space.

Ah! What memorial

Save yolk on a dish

Or two halves of a wish

For the rasorial?



***The Antidote to Moles***

The antidote to moles

Consists of dropping down their holes

Thick tufts of human hair

(It acts like itching powder there),

Some castor oil (the stuff will stick

To fur in a thick, stubborn slick),

And, finally, if these measures fail,

A seven-week-old gilded stale

Of human urine. The mole’s mate

Will kick him out. Henceforth his fate

Will be to writhe in dirt, scratching

At skin that won’t stop itching,

Digging out blood that will refuse

To clot, mingled with oily ooze—

Thus he’ll go slickly, itchily slinking

Off to die somewhere, blind, unloved, and stinking.



***Woodchuck***

Nietzsche the gardener says,

*An estimable enemy*

*Returns your gaze.*

*If I must have a foe,*

*Let it be an Über-Rodent*

*Or Overcrow.*

A certain foe of mine

Subverts *my* plot—an undermining

Catiline,

A groundhog none can kill.

Smoke bombs and poison pellets only

Inflame his Will.

And if I quarantine

Inside a chicken-wire cage

My leafy green,

He sizes up the hoard,

Pops up from underneath and drags

The smorgasbord

Down through an earthen drain.

What stratagem could stump his extra-

Moral brain?

I try hard to destroy you,

But only make you stronger, chuck—

Or merely annoy you.

In such an enemy

I can take pride. (I think I’ve seen you

Climb a tree.)



***Rats in the Attic Library***

*The Books:*

Formidable defences were placed

at their disposal. This bookcase

was their ark, their *aron kodesh.* אהרן קודאש

Mesh wire flourishing along the shelves.

Bait traps, poison-packets littering the floor.

What an education for the rats to negotiate

so many prohibitions and incitements…

*The branches of learning.*

*The Rats:*

If they could put their struggle into words

they might write poems about how hard

it is to get at the Essential.They’re hungry

for the glue that holds the things together.

*We have more need of it*

*Than they. That is why*

*It is ours.*

The loftiest shelves were the greatest challenge,

but they mastered the lie of the levels, reduced

the infrastructure of the Beautiful and True

to the elements of an intramural agronomy.

One could picture little cities with their temples

springing up from this sophisticated economy.

*Survival is subversion*

*Eating away*

*The Monument of Famine.*

**\* \* \***

The books are part of the rats.

What the rats did to the books

is part of the books.

*What do we gnaw?*

The *Tanakh*, split into two roughly

equal fractions of Testament:

Samson-work of many teeth.

*mettame et ha-Yadayim.*

מאטאם שעון מזרחי יאדאיים *Tannaitic literature employs the phrase* mettame et ha-Yadayim *(‘rendering the hands unclean’) to convey what is commonly understood by ‘canonical’. According to rabbinic enactment, hands that came into direct contact with any biblical book contracted uncleanness in the second degree, so that without prior ritual washing*

*they rendered it unfit for priestly use (Kelim 15:6; Yad. 3:2; 4:6). Whatever the true origin and purpose of this legislation (Yad. 3:3–5; Tosef., Yad. 2:19; Shab. 13b–14a; TJ, Shab. 1:6, 3c), the effect was to make the phrase ‘rendering the hands unclean’ synonymous with canonical.*

Even a fractured Canon

can dirty the hands.

**\***

Fragments of the *Fragments of Heraclitus*…

**\***

Goethe is partially devoured.

**\***

What have they done to *The Rat Man*?

**\***

Food for thought.

*Food.*

*‘If the Book is merely tasted, it is*

*nothing. But if the Book is swallowed,*

*it has been accorded the status of food.*

*This is the principle of* ach’shevei.’

—Rashi*(93a, DH Mipnei*

*she'Yecholah)*

**\***

Is their gnawing

a kind of knowing?

*The scrolls are in our bellies*

*And the taste is sweet.*

**\* \* \***

My share increased in dispossession:

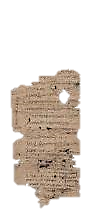
Religion [of what] remains

[when everything has

been taken

away].

**\***



***Maxims and Reflections of La Poochefoucauld***

In the misfortunes of our dearest masters there is something that does not

displease us.

*\**

First one dog barks, then another, and soon the entire neighborhood resounds

to a cacophonous chorus. The polite phrase for this? “Public opinion.”

*\**

*Salivation History.—*What is this thing the chien moyen sensuel so piously

honours with the name “religion”? A conditioned response to the ringing of a bell.

*\**

Xenophanes, you were right. God is only the mirror image of Dog. Even His priests

wear collars.

*\**

*The Cynic’s Riposte.—*Plato: “Somewhere in the Eternal Realms is the perfect Idea

of Bone.”—Diogenes: “No doubt. And the Platonic Idea of Mange.”

*\**

Language is is an unruly kennel: the words never quite get used to each other’s sense.

*\**

*The Enlightenment.—*Once we barked at the moon; now we bark at the sun.

\*

Go on with your circular quest till you bite your own tail, continue till you

swallow yourself entire! At least you will never be hungry again.

\*

Whatever can be gummed does not deserve to be eaten.

\*

*Bone-Burying*.—If for once we understood *why* we bury them, perhaps we would

remember *where*.

\*

Bone is two things: food and toy. And yet a third: private property.

The origins of culture and society.

“Even a stray dog finds a bone to crunch,” reads the ancient proverb. Then why do

our philosophers *never* get it right?

\*

Clearly, whoever still uses the phrase “the marrow of the matter” has never

chewed on a rubber bone.

My critics complain: “His aphorisms are mere word-play, with no relation to reality.” Wasn't it Heraclitus who said, “Dogs always bark at what they do not recognize”?

\*

Bedouin dogs have a saying: “You might as well bury your bones in the shifting sand.”

\*

Wisdom is easily identified: it is always that voice barking in the wilderness.

\*

Vanity, vanity, all is—*squirrel!*

**\***

**

*****small threnody***

i.

the cockroach came in search of food

& found his fate instead

began deadset on getting fed

& ended simply dead

the looter of the cupboard shelf

became the reaper’s pelf

and rummaging through scraps of trash

became the trash itself

for humankind’s immortal grudge

reduced him to a smudge

the best of us but leave behind

a brittle chitinous rind

the roach is dead  besmutched with gore

we shall not see his like again

for seconds minutes maybemore

now let the threnody begin

*oh carried in a little bin*

*he sleeps among the coffee grounds*

*nor hears the shrieks & keening sounds*

*of all his mournful cockroach kin*

*the cries are loud  the tears are many*

*beating of thorax  torn antennae*

ii.

the roach is dead  but should we care

three more just crawled across the chair

the roach is a generic creature

devoid of individual feature

who could parse such faceless vermin

into a sam a sue a herman

not i for one in fact the chances

are that only a st francis

could find it in his heart to loveall

creeping things that grope and grovel

& could the gentleman from assisi

preach to roach and not feel queasy

the roach has reached the other shore

we shall not look on such a one

for seconds minutes maybemore

now let the obsequies be done

*oh bear him in his little bin*

*he sleeps among the coffee grounds*

*nor hears the shrieks & keening sounds*

*of all his mournful cockroach kin*

*the cries are loud the tears are many*

*beware o humans left if any*

***Minuscule Elegy***

***For the Fallen Ants***

i.

For those who swarmed to form a living bridge

And, as their comrades crossed the raging streamlet,

Fell

Into its current and were muscled

Along toward a hapless doom:

May these few words, too small to drape the grandeur

Of such a selfless deed, stand sign and sigil

For these honored dead.

ii.

For those who, foremost of the swart phalange

In toil and formication of pitched battle,

Fell

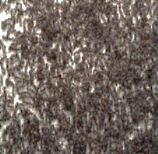
To pinches of an armoured foeman,

Leaving their brittle dolmens there:

May these slight and unworthy verses poultice

The piercèd thorax with a hymn of glory,

Pledge of deathless praise.

****

*****Cortège***

I.

Tome Tome TOME TOME, the footnotes pound

Into the impressionable GRound.

The earth booms like a kettledrum

As on, with stately stomp, they come.

Balanced, with sombre steps and slow,

Between procession and tableau,

They Move their bodies’ ponderous cargo

At a deliberative largo,

Whilst raising to the blood-red sun

A valedictory orison,

Blaring, through pairs of ivory commas,

Their *morituri salutamus*.

While in the trees the grave macaques

Sit quiet as books arranged in stacks,

They trudge with stiff arthritic pain

Across a yellowing parchment plain

Toward the place that is, for them,

Definitive *terminus ad quem*.

II.

As in their solemn ranks they pass,

Flattening the savannah grass;

As lingering truancies of day

Slink off before the encroaching grAy,

The moon, in gown of borrowed light,

Decrees a pause from fight-or-flight

Down from her little podium hill,

Shushing her creatures to be still

With ghostly finger at her lips.

*Now the tentative little sips*

*Of svelte gazelles cease in the sedge*

*That rims the shrinking water’s edge.*

*Turtles withdraw into their shells*

*To meditate like monks in cells.*

*The riddle of the female penis*

*Puzzles the minds of the hyenas.*

*Baobabs, with their crazy-angled*

*Limbs and branches, appear entangled*

*In radical reassessments. Lions*

*Ponder their sanguinary science:*

*‘Ah! Is this life, or mere existence,*

*Chasing zebras into the distance?’*

III.

*Having transfixed her silly broods*

*In taxidermic attitudes,*

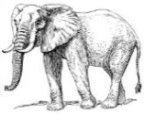
*The moon retires to write her memoirs.—*

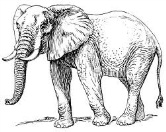
*But who could count the many grim wars*

*She has witnessed? She could spend ages*

*Blackening all those pallid pages*

*Her chronically memorious Muse*

*Must ask Methuselah to peruse.*

*and yet she has her helpful scholars.*

*(Call them inveterate recallers.)*

*Nothing about their gait seems hurried,*

*Nothing triumphal, nothing worried,*

*Much that’s greatly resigned. (Can Fate*

*Arrive too early or too late?)*

*The place they reach—where mountains topple—is*

*The graveyard (or, in Greek,* νέκροπολις*)*

*Where they lie down with grateful groans*

*On an ancestral bed of bones.*

IV.

*Distinguished moon, be kind, upraise them!*

*Don’t let the scholiast worms deface them.*

*(Remember how they sat all night*

*Beneath your papery slips of light*

*In baggy, wrinkled coats, and wept*

*Over your works, when jackals slept?)*

*Set them among the beasts that track*

*Their prey across the Zodiac,*

*To qualify their savage frisks*

*With little silvery asterisks. \**

*Grant them this high sabbatical \**

*Until your last, pale page is full \**

*Of darkness; till in the sublime \**

*And cavernous Study Hall of Time \* \**

*The Ancient of Days lays down his head \* \**

*And sleeps, and snores, to wake the dead. \**

**

***Monster Movie***

Wolfman and Dracula,

The Mummy and the Fly

Are playing poker on an oil drum

In a warehouse on the sly.

There’s just one naked light bulb,

It dangles from a string

Like a killer in a noose the night

They hang him at Sing-Sing.

“Where’s Frankenstein?” Says Wolfman.

“He’d better show his face.”

“Keep your shirt on,” laughs the Mummy

As he deals himself an ace.

“He’s a dead man!” snarls the Wolfman

And cracks himself a beer.

Count Dracula the pretty boy

Primps in an empty mirror.

The Fly is hanging from the ceiling.

(He’s eyeing the beer cans.)

Wolfman looks up and growls: “You cheat!

Quit looking at our hands!”

“Next time we do it my way, see?”

Wolf chomps on his cigar.

“Relax,” says Mummy through his gauze.

“That sounded like his car.”

But no, it was the Heat outside.

(When has crime ever paid?)

They’d come with crosses, silver bullets,

And a tall can of Raid.

“What’d I tell you?” Wolfman howled.

“That Frank’s a dirty rat!”—

The coppers cuffed his hairy paws

While the beast snarled and spat.

The Vampire bared his fangs, but he

Was looking pretty scared.

The Mummy came unwound. The Fly

Just rubbed his hands and stared.

And now the place is empty,

The bulb swings to and fro,

The cards lie scattered on the floor

And Frank’s in Mexico.



***King Rex the Tyrant***

Every Sunday or so, when with heart

high-sorrowful and cloyed

he rested from his day job,

you would not see him at his usual pasturage,

ripping meals from that great meat orchard

as he crashed his way down to a skyline luridly inflamed.

At such intervals, the animal world retired

to lick its wounds in silence, free

of those deafening shock waves from the swamp

when the thick-skinned King (who was also very thin-skinned)

pulled up short at his dinner to roar at his food:

DON’T LOOK AT MY HANDS!

Often you would find him in his palace

entertaining guests, in a genial mood,

eating, at most, two servants, and passing up a canapé.

A curtain would part to reveal, for connoisseurs,

the botches of his "abstract expressionist" paintings,

or he would read with a suavely modulated growl

from his latest forays into the realms of Erato.

And when the great gilded grandfather clock

in the hallway banged the ineluctable hour,

his chorus of toadies knew what to say:

*Sire, won't you favor us with a little Debussy?*

And we shuffled through the double doors

into the auditorium.

Industrial-strength kettledrum footsteps

crescendo'd from stage right.

He squeezed into view, his head bedizened

with a dandruff of klieg light shards.

He landed on the piano bench, squared

his shoulders to put a little wallop into it,

and then it was difficult to deny

that the up-and-down Clonk Clank Clownking

had begun.

Fine lacquered rosewood flew into chunks

of lumber exploding toward the ceiling

like a cloud of broken teeth, snapped strings

flailed like riot hoses slipped from the grasp.

All this time he watched over his work

with satanic eagle eyes hooded

by the ancestral crests of his orbital bones.

But now and then those eyes

seemed to look out at us in perplexity,

as if to ask why destiny had appointed him

to level the lyrical to the literal

with such monstrous finesse—

like that dream of a pagoda poised

over its reflection in a lake

collapsing into splinters of the physical damage

he was inflicting with those vengeful vestigial hands.

Ah, he could swallow a tank,

but an octave he could not span!

On and on the pounding softened us up

like the overture to a beach landing,

no place to hide in the inland of the ear,

he continued to torture Debussy,

blatantly violating the Geneva Accords,

and not to dangle from the rafters

by a piano wire was sufficient reward

for the strain of faking rapturous attention

and what else *could* we have done but pretend to listen

to what most of us still deny they ever saw?



***David Graybeard and the Kerosene Cans***

*And he dwelt in*

On the day that David burst into his dazzle *the land of Gombe...*

   The screech magnificoes were at their thrash,

Shaking great hanks of yellowing green in the sizzle

   Of the sun—A bang. Heads turned. A flash.—

Hunched coteries howled to behold them baltering down

  Past nits and picks of tufted hair—*O Master*

*Of thunder-shine!—*twin cans that battered on

  Ahead of his long reach: he, scampering faster,

Caught up to what he had pushed with conative thrust.—

  And the old Alpha’s crass and grabbed potestas

Loosened—he lost his ancient sway. In the must

  Of his pride walked David now, in a dangle of testes,

Steward of Oestrus, ready his dung to fling.

  And the stoop of the years brought gladness to his glands,

Much rump and postured fealty. For the King

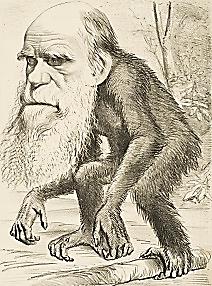
  Was righteous in his judgments and commands.

Some say when white-haired age had dimmed his eyes

To dark Sheol he would not knuckle under,

But in wet season still patrols the skies,

Pissing the rain, banging the cans of thunder.





***The Ancient Origins of Erotic Art***

Beating your chest, ripping out hanks of grass

(Lust in the animal kingdom of the mind),

You ooh-ooh-ooh when she presents her ass,

Inviting you to reproduce your kind.

O that good old bonòbo bump-and grind

On simian Cupid’s archery range, that sass,

That waggle of a red bull’s-eye your blind

Heat-seeking muscle couldn’t miss!—Alas:

Inklings of thought invade your horny heart,

A skinny homunculus with an egg-shaped head

Gestates inside a mutant chromosome

Till you’re that four-eyes who reads Proust in bed

And pens some elbow-patched and dusty tome

On the ancient origins of erotic art.

******

***Happy Dancer***

Swollen with bloody joy (fresh from the kill)

Who is that happy dancer at high noon

Repeating himself in cartwheels down the hill?

*Baboon!*

*Baboon!*

*Baboon!*

*Baboon!*

*Baboon!*



***Golden Retriever on a Sunday Morning***

At crack of dawn you walk the neighborhood,

   Disturbing the peace, as if it were your mission.

You barked once: it was good; and what is good,

   You think, can only improve with repetition.

From one end of the leash the sounds escape;

   At the other end (to poignant fate resigned)

Wincing Reluctance takes a human shape

   In order to be dragged along behind.

More than a bark, a sort of barkle shoots

   From your mouth at rakish angles, lighting a blaze

Of pantomime in rooms, as shadowy mutes

   Leap to their windows, shaking the Fists of Praise.

Why should you think that so much as a *Darn it!*

   Is in their thoughts? Much rather a *Hark! Hark!*

*It is the sound of bumptiousness incarnate,*

*Made flesh to yell among us, for a lark.*

But that is what the whited cats most hate,

   So suddenly uncurled from their porch chairs:

How you so placidly vociferate

   Past an arched gauntlet stiffening on the stairs.

Some heads are cocked: *What news needs such an early*

*Edition, in such* **boldface***hype?*—Inside

Your bushel of exclamation marks, there’s clearly

   A light that has no present plans to hide.

You anoint your nose with soil, you are relentless

To tell its weight in sound to every smell;

Only the dried up and the utterly scentless

   Reach out in vain for a lusty decibel.

The lions, the bears, the less hirsute performers—

   The floppy-footed clowns kicking up sawdust—

Is it they who merit billing so enormous,

   Painted in strokes that range from broad to broadest?

Or is the circus in that raucous tent

  Your ruckus raises everywhere it goes?

So the announcement is the Great Event,

  The Carnival Barker himself the Show of Shows?

You are no leper, sir; that is not Esau’s

   Pelt you wear—it is Joseph’s coat. The park

Awaits; children will greet you from their seesaws:

   Go, mingle the golden sunshine with the bark.

Ignore the finger-wagger, the head-shaker,

   Spread the Good Noise, and stride on blithely by;

Offer a funhouse mirror to your Maker,

   The imperious Impresario in the Sky.



**\* *Z e p h y r* \***



*Do you see that kitten chasing so prettily her own tail? If you could look*

*with her eyes, you might see her surrounded with hundreds*

*of figures performing complex dramas….*

*­­­­­*

--Ralph Waldo Emerson

*\*            \*           \**

*When I play with my cat, who knows but that she regards*

*me more as a plaything than I do her?*

--Michel de Montaigne

***Grand Entrance***

The door swings open. Paws advance.

Important whiskers. Golden pants.

Sound the trumpet. Bang the drum.

Here comes the littlest Panjandrum.

***Personality Profile***

A cobby tabby,

Not at all crabby,

Inclines to chubby,

Legs rather stubby…

Stroking her fur

Evokes a purr

A pleasing chirp

Will oft usurp.

Her puffy coat

Is brown—but note

The downy white

Streaks that highlight

The chest and belly

(As soft as jelly).

White spats enclose

Tenacious toes

From which extend

Those claws that rend

In two the moth

And satin cloth.

Her morning chore’s

To stop your snores

With urgent meows

Designed to rouse

You (with some screaming)

From pleasant dreaming.

Why ask the Maine

Coon to explain

Why the Maine Coon

Wakes up so soon?

A Maine Coon Cat

Is just like that.

***Genealogy***

Of hardy stock,

Foe to the lock,

This cat will pout

If not let out.

Bred on the farm

To do rats harm,

She slept by day

On bales of hay

In dusty loft.

At night, with soft

And stealthy tread,

She left her bed

To find and termin-

Ate whiskered vermin.

***New England Gnomics***

Under the sky

The vole will die.

But in the house

Death takes the mouse.

(The Maine Coon Cat

Will see to that.)

And let the bug

Upon the rug

Fall to its knees

And makes its peace

With the just God

Of the arthropod

When the Coon Cat

Inspects that mat.

***In Catilinam***

For vehemence of declamation,

What squirrel could top that Cicero

Hopping-mad on the branches’ tips?

Loftily conscious of his station,

He sneers down on the wretch below.

Scolding-hot scorn pours from his lips

While a grave senatorial bird

Appears to nod at every word.

Down there, in no particular hurry,

Deaf to this savage indignation,

The culprit yawns. The invective climbs

To further heights of righteous fury,

With pitiless enumeration

Of all the scoundrel’s plots and crimes—

But if he hears, he gives no sign,

This lazy little Catiline.

******

***Empty Bowl***

She opens her mouth. Her intense

Eyes follow me, full of soul.

Declamatory vehemence

Denounces the empty bowl.

***Poem: Her Tongue, How It Sticks Out***

So much is packed into your microcosm

(Item: one exquisitely creased nose blossom),

You have so many golden links with Heaven,

I’m pressed to give each genuinely Pseudo-

Dionysian charm its proper kudo

(Or is it kudos?) in these poems you live in.

Thus if I slight your pink slip of a tongue

I slight the All. (How could I leave unsung

Even your smallest stubs of grace? They tip

The world.)—Rose petal, slim slice of prosciutto,

All unexpectedly it will protrude, oh-

So-daintily subtending the upper lip!

With that sublime naïveté a few old

Statues embody (gaudy eyes bejeweled),

You stare, clueless what joy you give sad Pluto

As he peers up at you from his dark meadow:

You, brightly bannering your fail bravado,

Your slice of rose, your petal of pink prosciutto.



***Skeletonics***

Diminutive Zephyr,

Though slow as a heifer,

Likes raw Hasenpfeffer,

And will endeavor

In ways that are clever

To seize the leveret

By the neck bone, and sever it.

Ah, the spring fever it

Must be that plays deliberate

Havoc with prudence,

Making the blood dance

Hot in the veins of the two tense

Legs of the bunny

In weather that’s sunny,

That makes him incautious

When he should be nauseous

With fear of the huntress

Who will flay, or will undress,

If you will, the poor coney

Down to the bone, he

All the while screaming

At his unseaming

While blood comes streaming

From guts that are steaming

And the bad dreaming

Ends only with death, and bugs teeming.

(It’s nature’s law.)

And then the guffaw,

The religious awww!

At the white of her paw

And her delicate claw

Stop short at the ghastly jaw

Gaping aside

Naked of hide

Of the creature that cried

As he struggled and died

In the jaws of the Zephyr:

Last week’s Hasenpfeffer,

Gone now forever.

We rub her nose

In shames and no’s

But each of us knows

That that’s how it goes.

She does what she does:

She is what she will be and was.

We clean up the bones and the fuzz.

And should we ever

Locate the lever

The turns off her habit

Of killing the rabbit

I’m not sure we’d grab it.

***Nine Life Slices***

1.

  A crack in the door.

A paw. An arm. A shoulder.

  Two green eyes. A cat.

2.

  Come over here you

Make me uncomfortable

  Go away pet me.

3.

  Sitting at the door,

*Déjà vu*. Wasn’t I here

  A moment ago?

4.

  Sitting by a tree

I am startled by the sound

  Of one leaf falling.

5.

  Loud noises issue

From a mouth whose shape outlines

  A small, empty bowl.

6.

  Since I don’t know how

To pull the door open, I’ll

  Keep pushing at it.

7.

  Clearly the world is

Structured like a scratching post.

  Good thing I have claws.

8.

  Cherry blossom.

Cherry blossom. Cherry blossom.

  Cherry blossom. *Finch!*

9.

Crouched behind the bush…

What you see is a rose, not

A rose-colored nose.



**\* *Triolets from the Garden of Zephyr \****

**1. *Butterfly***

Creeping discreetly through the grass,

I see a butterfly flutterby.

(The snack’s too light. I let it pass.)

Creeping discreetly through the grass,

I’m stalking robins, which—alas!—

Though plump and slow, my form descry

Creeping discreetly through the grass.

(I see a butterfly flutterby.)

**2. *Mockingbird***

The Mockingbird’s a shocking bird.

Why must she squawk at me? It’s rude.

Even Audubon, I think, concurred:

*The Mockingbird’s a shocking bird.*

And am I in the least deterred

From my designs upon her brood?

The Mockingbird’s a shocking bird.

*Why* must she squawk at me? It’s rude!

**3. *Tawny Interloper***

That tawny interloper pissed

All over my catnip patch again.

Instead of wincing when I hissed,

That tawny interloper, pissed,

Just raised his tail, and then—and then—

That tawny interloper pissed

All over my catnip patch again!

**4. *Waldo and Michel***

That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.

(I’m playing in the catnip with Michel.)

We note (it really seems beyond the pale)

That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.

We watch, we search for clues, and yet we fail

To find sufficient reason why the Hell

That crazy Waldo loves to chase his tail.

I’m playing in the catnip with Michel.

****

***Scratching Post***

How

can

this

human

stand

to

stay

on

his

two

thin

legs

that

way

day

in

day

out?

What

is

it

he

begs

for?

It

must

be

a

truly

 HUGE

 treat.

(On

those two flat feet!)

***Cuisine Beguine***

I’m bored with what rattles in cardboard.

But as for the steel that won’t stain,

It is filled with things fit for a lord:

How I love what the bright cans contain!

From the locker of Mr. Jones, Davy

Come some of the riches I crave,

Harvest reaped from the salt-seasoned wave:

For this I’d enlist in the Navy.

(And I don’t understand why you skimp

On the cans that envelop the shrimp.)

Yet the flesh of the chicken is braver

(I refer to its splendorous flavor).

But above all I wish to assert

That I think I’d desert from the Navy,

Even crawl through the desert, if only

I was sure that my just dessert

Would consist of the *Slices in Gravy*.

(With milk on the side, who’d be lonely?)

I confess it has caused me some hurt

That you’ve chosen to be so inert

In perceiving how awful a crisis

You cause when you hold back those beautiful *Slices*.

***Gardening Tip***

You plant the stuff because you like to watch a

Cat nip catnip:

How cute to see Yours Truly

Go about it!

You never thought to put, beside that patch, a

Bit of ratnip—

Which shows how much you really

Know about it.

Look into it, then, could you, while I catch a

Little catnap?—

Try not to be unduly

Slow about it.

***Leave Me Alone***

Leave me alone.

I have no truck with your untidy ways, your Brobdingnagdian pretences leave me cold as stone.

Leave me alone.

I do not speak your tongue, your unportending syllables to me are as the click of bone on bone.

Leave me alone.

I’ll sit here by the window and gaze out at the lawn, so prickly with the life of birds and

bugs, which I shall make my own.

Leave me alone.

Do not attempt familiarities, nor try my tummy with your clumsy, prizing hands, you shan’t

extort from me the rusty tribute of a groan.

If you would win the softening of my sneer today, there’s nothing you can coo

or babble, nothing you can say.

Just go away.

***Will and Testament***

*Item.—*To Michel:

Half of my soul,

The wishing well

Of my slices bowl.

*Item.—*To the tawny-furred

Tom: the mockingbird

And his joy-buzzer rasp,

Just past his grasp.

*Item.—*To all mockingbirds:

Such things…! I have no words.

*Item.—*To my humans:

More discernment

Than they have hitherto shown.

When they sit out on the lawn,

May they be lonesome

A little,

In the evening.

Also the Busy Ball,

Long idle

And spent.

Plus, my catnip mouse,

That bit of old string,

Any old thing

Of mine they find about the house

In the weeks ahead

As my absence settles in

Like dust

On the chairs in the kitchen.

And oh: my wrinkled

Papers, that clutch

Of crinkled

Bags and such,

Tamped thoroughly flat:

They can have that.

***Where Do Good Cats Go?***

On tippy-toes you nibble at your ease

Those juicy treats that hang from tuna trees.

Mice run from you or yield, just as you please.

That’s all I know.

You knead the clouds, leap down from shelves of air

And land on puffballs. Oh what handsome fare,

What creature comforts, tasty creatures there

Where good cats go!

Discreet, obedient angels come on call

To keep your food bowl brimming, or to haul

Away the kitty litter—then they all

Leave you alone.

You rub your cheek against the world, you toss

It in the air and pat it with your paws

Until its yarn unwinds. You can, because

It’s stuff you own.

A downward glance will show the place of howls

Where fire-cats poke at veterinarians’ bowels

And dogs in trees wince at those thunderous growls

And glowing eyes.

And mockingbirds won’t look so smug or sly

Seeing Death’s wingèd fur ball hurrying nigh

(If what I’ve heard is true, that cats can fly

In Paradise).

You lie on flowers beside the River Cream,

Dismember bugs (with which the grasses teem),

Or simply curl into a ball and dream,

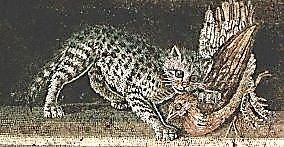
Where good cats go.

Into the flow you dip a drowsy paw

Sometimes, and from the milky liquid draw

A fish, and watch it dangle from your claw.

That’s all I know.



***As the Crow Flies***

High in the reaches combing the sky,

Wind through his feathers whistling by,

Stillness in motion, Angel the Crow

Shadows his signature over the snow.

Where he is flying, which of us knows?

Storm clouds gather, a dark wind blows.

Swift through the rise and the dip of his wings,

Swift through the marrow and air of his bones,

Swift through the honeycombed haunt of the marrow,

The wind is flying—the dark wind moans.

