

Mouse

“Caught the mouse,” my mother whispers, slipping
into her bedroom.

My dad mumbles something back in his sleep
but I can’t hear it,
their bedroom door swinging shut as I
stand in the frame.

We caught the mouse.

Two days ago I noticed droppings, and
yesterday the bread bin had been
raided,
slices shredded and nibbled.
I laughed so loud my mother screamed
at me, told me to
quiet down. I was quiet the rest of the day.
Quiet as a mouse.

We caught the mouse.

This morning my father said he watched
the mouse walk across the kitchen floor.
Our dog ate his breakfast,
my dad brewed his coffee,
and the mouse moused across the floor
to the basement.

I couldn’t see the mouse in my head
until then, just a faint collection of
breadcrumbs and droppings.
But suddenly I could see him.
Believed in him, taking his time
to mosey across our warm kitchen floors.

We caught the mouse.

We got home late and I,
too full of booze and Christmas spirit
was too brash to notice the mouse.
My mother let out a soft “*Oh.*”
Then I turned, and
she said there is the mouse and I
walked closer until

I could see the
mouse and then

I saw the mouse.

In my mind it was perched
on the shelf between
our breadbasket and granola bars,
chewing at a cardboard box
or building a nest from rolled oats.

The mouse lay on its stomach,
one arm extended the other
turned at a fifty-degree angle.
It was on top of a lime green
mat, manmade and unnatural,
and it was moving.

Writhing.

Trying to pull itself from the
adhesive but it was so *small*, its muscles
so *delicate*, that it barely moved.
You could only tell it was
moving was by looking
between its ears, watching as they
waved in the struggle.

I saw the mouse.

It was small.
So much smaller
than I imagined.
I knew what mice looked like,
had handled several in my
animal courses, but those were lab mice.

This was a wild mouse,
untouched by
human hands in any way, and it was
small.

The creature that strolled
across the kitchen was much bigger
in my mind, had more nerves
and courage in that big brain.

But all I saw was
tiny eyes,
black, and wide.

I saw the mouse.

My mother said there was nothing
to do.

That it would be
dead
by morning, and
that my dad would come and
take care of it
before I woke up and
worked off my hangover.

I thought of what I
could do, if I could
sneak down and peel it off
without damaging the
fragile bones, or even
just provide it company as it
asphyxiated.

But I figured what would be even more
terrifying for a
tiny prey animal was
a clumsy giant,
crying giant saltwater tears
through smeared Christmas Eve makeup.

I thought of the mouse.

I tried not to.
But as I pushed the
tears away from my
cheeks and trudged up the stairs
I did.

What if it was a mother mouse,
trying to provide enough
food for its young in the nest?

Or a bachelor mouse, who had
narrowly escaped the jaws
of a snake in our backyard, only

to be slaughtered
by a piece of plastic the color
of a tennis ball?
Or worse,
what if it was a young mouse?

I thought of the mouse.

A mouse that had just
left its nest,
ventured away from
mother and litter mates.

What if it took up
residence in our pantry for
the last two days, just to
escape the freezing weather?
What if this was its first
home of its own?
Away from the other mice?

I think of the mouse.

As I sit here writing this
a mouse sits in my pantry,
paralyzed and frightened.

It cannot move.
It cannot escape.
And slowly,
it cannot breathe.

As I sit here writing this, a creature is downstairs
dying.

And all I can do is cry.