

Victor

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We never would have guessed—age six and 12,
ears pressed against the baseboard’s fleur-de-lis—
that shavings, fur, and teeth were sonorous:
a thousand mice can make a lot of noise.
Inside the racks of plastic boxes, they bite
the water spouts’ thick lips, click ear tags, squeak,
and multiply. Each week a woman shouts
the names of boxes set for sacrifice,
a bingo game in which A6 will go,
B7 stay. I miss the strategy
of death, thrill of droppings trails behind
the fridge, the Victor traps dad spread with Jif,
the sticky sheets we laid like landing strips
across the kitchen tile. We thought we saw
mice everywhere. Your gray-toed, mateless socks
were curled like bodies. Dad’s epaulettes were fringed
with thin, pink tails. And when it came—a crack
of alloy springs, a squeal, a wood-flesh thud—
we ran to watch the facedown, flailing mouse
succumb. It pissed and twitched so long I looked
away. Everyone dies quicker now.
They say it took you seconds: the squeak of brakes,
a detonated car bomb, shrapnel, dark.
At the wake, I gripped your dog tag tight
enough to leave your name incised inside
my fist. I know how clean it is to snap
a spine, how swift if done correctly. A pinch
of fur, the tail tugged back until I hear
the oft-repeated sound of sacrifice—
the crunch of bone, pebbles under boots.

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