

The Stray

ERIC ANDERSON

And now it's raining on you;
I think we can both agree
on that. Against my window, I hear it,
and you must be soaked under
some bush or in the shed,
which I casually left open
the way women in old movies
drop their handkerchiefs. Never
mind how I found you
in the basement, meowing
on a love seat, the palatial
home to several generations
of mice. Never mind the outside
entrance where you followed
the chipmunks darting in
and out, or how I lured you
up the leaf-covered
steps into the white light
of the world with torn bits
of a hot dog, flesh of some
other flesh, which I imagined
you had as much right to as I did.

Better to give you this dead than
to have you make more,
the family of mice not knowing
the beast on their roof, the chipmunks
escaping claw and fang. Never mind
my grandfather, who could not afford
any more animals and so
clubbed the spring kittens
on a workbench and dumped
their limp bodies in the trash. On
the framed metal shelves, the traps
capture only dust.

There, there, I want to say
to you, mother to child, well
friend to ill. *There*,
there. The gold-gray storm
swells cold in the windows.
The stone walls heave
more each year. The house folds
in on itself. How angry I am
at the world, angry enough
to kill someone, especially
the person who loved you so
briefly, then turned you
loose into the world for me
to turn away.

And yet I can't
even kill these rodents, and want
to protect them from you,
and also want you
not to starve but will no longer
feed you or let you stay.
This, then, is being human.
This, then, is not being God.