

The Mouse Colony

Katerina Tsiopos

The Mouse Colony: Deep Cell

Ounce for ounce

Mice are meaner than

Rats. They are inheritors of

Seemingly boneless bodies

They squeeze and escape

Through crevices coexisting

In risky symbiosis with fleas,

Virus, and hunger.

We scientists try to plot their

Brief cantankerous lives –

Weavers and shakers –

Jump, spin, run, gnaw, breed

In five perfect five-dimensions.

Like us,

They carry immutable genes

In embryotic memory:

Timeless dancing dams and sires.

Labome, JAX, Charles River

Cultivate their namesakes,

Mutations, their elite flaws:

Dementia and forgetfulness,

The renewed Lethe.

Parkinson's slight missteps,
 Telltale quivering hands –
 Diabetes or cancer,
 Genes gone wild.
 We carry those, too.
 We study our outside selves
 In the deep laboratory,
 The colony of science.

The Mouse Colony: Four Corners

Heavy snows and rains revived
 Drought-stricken piñon groves.
 How we love a surplus of food.
 We eat till we burst, breed until we infest.
 Four Corners, USA, May 1993,
 The deer mice fattened
 Eating ten times more piñon nuts
 You danced in the rain,
 Hanta virus flourished in the desert.

The Mouse Colony: Double Helix

Direct address: you and I
 Reluctantly live side-by-side.
 You steal food from our silos,
 Drop your scat
 In the harvested grain.
 I collect your kind in the air-conditioned,
 Air-purified, water-purified
 Cloistered labs – in this medical colony

That I might learn why my mother weaves,
 Why my brother shakes in his sleep,
 I keep you close – too close.

The Mouse Colony: Novosibirsk Paeons

We have come to this, gratefully: a mouse,
 Chill scientists waxed artistic.
 Fashioning an eternally busy mouse sculpture
 Acknowledging your many many
 Deaths in the service of science.
 Bespectacled statue, frozen knitting
 DNA chains in a Siberian backdrop
 In front of the Institute of Genetics.
 You deserve the paeons as
 You squat on rear haunches
 A shawl drawn close
 Against the white nights
 Hunched shoulders
 Fingers working the knitting needles,
 In perpetuity
 Knitting needles
 Weaving a double helix.
 Ice encrusts the bronze mouse body
 In the icy heart of Novosibirsk.



The Mouse Colony: *Mus Musculus*

Here you are, *mus musculus*, house mouse,
You escape from science to
Colonize my domestic world,
Invade my nights of twitchy dreams.
I have contained you, Mouse,
For years in the colony of science,
Changed your bed shavings,
Sterilized your polycarbonate cages,
Fed you with the world's most
Precious kibble and precise water.
Technicians raised your mouse pups.
You smell of mammal regret.
In captivity, your fur
Cools from the ketamine injection.
I slice your tissue, capture the tell-tale diseased cells
That model human dis-ease
In the grey light of the electron microscope.