

***Daniel Tobin***

## **In a Station of the Retro**

Into the halting, halted  
car of the Red Line train  
walk two lobster claws,  
enormous, inside a plastic bag

followed by the carrier  
who holds them from himself.  
Whatever passes for a face  
on the prelapsarion—bead eyes,

slack, crustaceous whiskers—  
must be staring at fog  
like mudwater in an ancient sea,  
something akin to incredulity:

mine, as if somehow I've been  
trapped by chance, or the alien,  
into the scene, and not a soul  
but myself, apparently,

(with all the antennae sundered  
by the scuttlings of the day),  
lifting an astonished gaze  
from mobile phone or Kindle.

I go back to reading my book.  
How distinguished they look—  
the claws, black, brackish, tinged  
red like oncoming dawn, or a town

burning just out of sight: the claws—  
protruding, still, each fastened  
with a yellow rubber band, curved,  
perfect, and wholly parenthetical.

## Three Cat Night

### *1. Cita*

This morning she brings us her gift—  
Murdered bird, a wren, displayed  
On our back porch, feathers matted,  
Head turned from us like a distracted child.

She came to us in spring, nursed her litter  
In the open shed—new life nested  
Behind nattered brooms, boxes, the shears  
We use to prune excess from the wild

When garden and yard begin to flesh  
Beyond custom or care. At the door,  
The two we'll keep fix on her, she  
Who can abide them less and less,

Who would have them out—blind urge  
To set them on their way, the release  
The charge from her body's ciphered code.  
The one will have to go. She reaches

Now to where a bite scabs badly over,  
The wound we salve, the salve she'll lick  
Sleekly on her lone perch—such skill,  
Such scald beneath the brave coat, un-healing.

2. *Darcy*

Again brazenly up  
The forbidden table,  
Nuzzling newspapers,  
Pill containers, books  
(Our lives' haphazard  
Safeguards, fritterings  
Aspirational), on such  
He'd impart his scent,  
His sign of ownership;  
And down, then, racing  
Around the room, toy-  
Ing with titular toys,  
Catnip mice, the wands  
Feather tethered, plush,  
Mimicking lineaments  
Of prey; or he's whirling  
Suddenly after (like us)  
His own tail, hotwired,  
After whatever he's  
After, concupiscent,  
Before he chirps, nips,  
Mews, to be lifted up,  
Or leaps, collapsing  
Into a lap to writhe  
There, a furtive look  
Before he turns, stills,  
His long body lax,  
Athletic soft tuxedo,  
The paws pausing now,  
His silk eye narrowing  
As though in an ecstasy  
That says we love him  
As we love ourselves,  
Perfectly imperfect,

Before he startles off  
Again, elegant flame,  
Again in pursuit, now  
Looking out, glancing  
Back from the glass door—  
Lithe in the scattered sunlight.

3. *Sean*

In the potted sage, your whole body curled  
Like a fresh croissant, blazing ginger fur  
Tiger striped, torso quietly lifting  
With every easy breath, you stretch to wake,  
Paws splayed open, two Chinese fans,  
Back arched in an un-breaking, rippling wave  
That folds, unfolds, into nothing other  
Than yourself: O risen, imperious yawn.

Infant, ancient, you tumble in front of us  
Buddha-bellied, expectant, and when we  
Take you up it's as if in you the world  
Had called home some lost tenderness.

Your tail, that rhythmic semaphore, keeps  
Its own time. When a hand un-halts  
The faucet's bland, directed rush, it's you  
Who comes leaping to embrace the rushing  
Wonder we take for granted. Let your eyes  
Lazar their topaz to the presence sensed  
Behind the wall; crouch, still, or amble back,  
Your body curled again in the potted sage.