

# The Meadow Mouse

by Theodore Roethke

1

In a shoe box stuffed in an old nylon stocking  
Sleeps the baby mouse I found in the meadow,  
Where he trembled and shook beneath a stick  
Till I caught him up by the tail and brought him in,  
Cradled in my hand,  
A little quaker, the whole body of him trembling,  
His absurd whiskers sticking out like a cartoon-mouse,  
His feet like small leaves,  
Little lizard-feet,  
Whitish and spread wide when he tried to struggle away,  
Wriggling like a minuscule puppy.

Now he's eaten his three kinds of cheese and drunk from his  
bottle-cap watering-trough--  
So much he just lies in one corner,  
His tail curled under him, his belly big  
As his head; his bat-like ears  
Twitching, tilting toward the least sound.

Do I imagine he no longer trembles  
When I come close to him?  
He seems no longer to tremble.

2

But this morning the shoe-box house on the back porch is empty.  
Where has he gone, my meadow mouse,  
My thumb of a child that nuzzled in my palm? --  
To run under the hawk's wing,  
Under the eye of the great owl watching from the elm-tree,  
To live by courtesy of the shrike, the snake, the tom-cat.

I think of the nestling fallen into the deep grass,  
The turtle gasping in the dusty rubble of the highway,  
The paralytic stunned in the tub, and the water rising,--  
All things innocent, hapless, forsaken.

*DRA Comment: Roethke, whose father ran a greenhouse, wrote passionately about nature and about people. This poem is about both. It inspired my poem about the passing of our family pet, a sweet old cat.*