

# My Rat

by John Riley

Today I'll make the call  
to exterminate  
the rat that lives  
behind the white plaster  
of my warehouse office.  
She's here in the morning  
when I flip the switch  
and catch a glimpse  
of her nose as it fades  
into her black space.  
Once there was a flash  
of five-digit claws,  
slate, soft stomach,  
slim tail, finely scaled;  
a face that slopes  
from wide, proud brow,  
down an aristocrat's nose.  
Late in the day I hear  
the hungry squeaks  
of her blind young.  
Nights, she wanders  
searching for food  
throughout this old mill  
where long-dead weavers  
once wove cheap fabric;  
where I spend my hours  
behind stacks of books  
on an assortment of subjects:  
Cortés and Montezuma,  
the St. Bart's Day Massacre,  
a few on diseases  
my rat will outlast.

We have shared our time,  
two lives, one phantom.  
I exited the night,  
she entered the day,  
in a dance we danced  
on feet that fell  
small on the earth.

