

Spring Cleaning

Harriet Hornblower

As the sun's slant
Reaches over the dark silhouettes
Of white pine and budding swamp maple,
I arise and contemplate the day's chores.
Spring light exposes the daily recession
Of snow retreating up against the forest's shadows.
I watch my cat prowling in the abandoned cow meadow
His black silhouette sharp against the rotting ice.
Spellbound by his hunt, I savor the coffee's rich advance
As it drives thick slumber in retreat with each arterial pulse.
Next arise and shake the quilts, fold, and stack them.
Take down the remnants of cobwebs.
Sweep the broom beneath beds,
Dense with last season's sleep.

Clear away the feathers and furs of fresh kills.
Feathers patterned in dove gray, russet, charcoal,
Winter white, pale yellow, slate, and sienna

Spiral delicately in the morning light
Furs of rough rust and silky moleskin
Eddy about the pine floorboards.

I sweep up organs rejected, furry tails, claws, beaks and teeth.
Scrub away the stains of dark carmine and dried brick
Despite my sorrows for the juncos, doves, chickadees,
For gray and red squirrels and star-nosed moles slain.
My midnight dark hunter has no thought to change.
After all, the quarry could elude his green-gold eyes and tapering
claws.
He purrs at my feet. Winter has made him eager
For the chase and the taste of fresh, hot life.

He never engages in discrimination or remorse.
It's the nature of my beast.

Shelling Peas

There is a beauty in shelling peas
I had quite forgotten.

Great grandmother's cooks
Dressed in white, hair rolled in buns,
Mounded pea pods in their hammocked aprons,
Grasped enameled bowls in free hands,
Seated themselves in a row of wooden chairs
On the green grass lawn behind the kitchen.

One of the cooks scooped three pods and
Placed them, a slippery-smooth feel,
On my outstretched palm.
She showed me the art
Of deftly pivoting

Each pod in my child's fingers.
To squeeze down upon the seam,
And pop it open
And discover, to my delight,
A row of freshly minted peas within.

Another cook leaned over
And taught me to run my index finger
From stem to apex,
Pinging the peas
Against the rim
Of the white enameled bowl
Snug in her lap.

The cooks sat, their backs to the steamy kitchen,
In the sunlight of an early summer sky,
Their eyes turning up

To watch breezes run

Laughing among the copper elm leaves.
They murmured about their youth, those times of
Running barefoot among the verdant pastures
Of Ireland, Sweden, other distant lands.
Then like a robber jay, I scooped a handful of peas
And gleefully rocketed away
Over the manicured lawns and terraces

To the cow-empty pasture
And wove my way through the chin-high grasses
With little thought of the enormity of my theft

Fresh peas in my calloused palm
Recall the primavera green
Youthfulness of flesh,
Fingers, no longer deft,

Place these green orbs,
As sacrament on my tongue.
Far off I hear
A distant rhythm of pops and pings,
Soft laughter, a sharing of memories,
I had quite forgotten.

--by Harriet Hornblower