

Creature of Habit

Nathan Stables

Dream the creature and it might crawl out
from a glass holder; the fluidity of line
and shape but knowing that its creation was
absolute and its self-destruction arranged long ago.
And I come sometimes, anticipating
that maybe the creature will flower a tail,
grow taller as light absorbs into his frayed skin and
shrink back when time calls him inward.

I know now that the mirror brings no promise
of change. I challenge its forward stare and meet
a creature, but not the one of my vision.
I see the unrelenting scorn of the sun, pock-marked
strips on pallid skin displaying a chameleon-like
talent of masking the truth, my inherited impatience
and resentment bubbling up. I peek ahead into
a smile so manufactured only my mother could have done better,
never willing to yield unhappiness lest it seem insincere.
I look deeper past the blue pools of my eyes over-framed by inching
black caterpillars to locate the real creature, whose
face concedes truth that mine no longer can. It conceals a
natural ease made cancerous from exposure to judgment, weighed
down by the residue of the day caught in the fibers of my clothes.

I leave the glossy face behind in a half-stupor,
undecidedly disappointed or motivated to lock the creature
away in its crystallized reflection within the glass. But the
resistance comes from within and oozes down and out the space between
my toes, cementing my step. I look down at the gooey imprisonment and sigh,
knowing how hard it is to change a creature of habit.