

Three Poems from Rat Tickling

rat tickling

1

this is a twitchy shifty world
as often as not it looks at you
sideways offering small pleasures
and unexpected dangers:
the sweet swerve of a red Mazda
gives both together: near death
and a sudden pleasurable rush

2

grace notes the colour of autumn
red leaves hesitate and fall then
layer the ground like scattered memories
through which the rats burrow
their yellow teeth grinning with prodigal joy

they too like being tickled
and provoked by a feather
they clutch their sides with laughter
wiping meaningless tears away

red leaves too easy
much harder this heave of grey fur
the near-silent rapture of a rat

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in the letter

there was nothing
of the tall ice floes
the beautiful bruise of sky
the potted meat still edible
after all these years

in the letter there was
the ineffable sadness
of French horns
on an imaginary

journey to the Faroes

there was the sadness
of ink fading I suppose
the sweet symmetry
of the folds your fingers
would have pressed
all weather out of

there was in the letter
little of my hopes
only the cursive slope
of how things were

and your small hand
movements frozen

First published in *Sport* (1999).

at Franz Josef

struggling to remember
marble-leaf carpodetus
the white veins clear
against the upraised green

we hear Pol Pot has died again
but the reception is poor
the TV has cataracts double
vision and snow blindness

the heart of the glacier
is as hard cold and blue
as a carefully carried memory
ruthless and perfect

we step awkwardly
from boulder to boulder
talking of the killing fields
the crimes of a man

until we are as close
as the yellow guard rope
and heaving river will permit
and we stand there listening

