

Twenty-One Rooms

My apartment lies twenty-on rooms away

I watch the light shift
through the day
inside a half-year-old calm,
in which the dust long ago settled
in the distant glow
of neighbors' intermittent signs of life,
like memories replayed
on a century-old phonograph;
yellowing sounds, noise in the pipes,
voices in the stairwell in a present left to itself,
where books have lost faith in the act of reading
and the water pipe hungers for thirst
while fridge & freezer stand dead silent
in their cavities
with terrycloth towels stuffed
into their gaping mouths,
and the floor speakers in their catatonic salutes
barely recall anymore
either avant-garde sound art
or tradition-laden Oriental classicism

Six-hundred miles north,
back through uninhabited rooms,
an Apodemus sylvaticus (Wood Mouse)
suddenly lies dead in the middle of the kitchen
like a memento mori

A red-furred cat at seventeen
descends from the water heater
under the sink
and slinks away in its shadow
like a photographic memory;
soft, restrained, utterly devoid of pretext

He probably, improbably, has nothing
to do with the dead mouse

I scoop up the mouse body
with a plastic bag
from a sourdough loaf from Willys
as a glove,
and dump it in the snow
outside the porch

It slithers away
and rolls in under the front step

A restrained thought
seeps time
where I stand

The day rolls off like a wheel loader,
yellow and Volvo-branded,
leaving those who don't keep up with their time
behind
in a string of rooms, pregnant with memories,
away through time

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Författaren Ingvar Loco Nordin med Poeter.se id #114094 innehar upphovsrätten