

Topsel's Beasts

Who can say for certain that such creatures
don't exist — sea-wolves and unicorns
and lamias with their *exemptile eyes*
which may be taken out and cast aside
for rest after a kill? Is it so strange
to believe as people once believed
that lemmings graze in clouds,
that apes are terrified of snails,
that elephants grow meek and timid when they see
a lovely girl, that mice may be spontaneously
ingendered in the earth, weasels give birth
through tunnels in their ears, or reindeers
when they walk make noises like
the sound of cracking nuts? So much
of what we know we take on trust.
Trust, then, that though you find me 'hard to handle'
when the long late day's full to the lintel
with love like this, I may be calm and gentle —
pliant, even, like the camelopardal
with his fifteen-foot long neck diversely coloured
and *so easie to be handled that a child*
may lead him with a line of cord, homeward.

Possibility

Some days perceive a budding
in their stems, a certain
itching in the skin of things.
Walls soften, conscious of a sudden

longed-for elasticity.
Chairs also become rubbery
sensing a suppleness in their frames
not felt at other times; and books
lying about, straight-backed and serious,
uproot, half-read, like curious
winged creatures; then the carpet
shifts and loosens on its sea-bed.
On such days it is down to us
whether we wait for things to pass
or manage with a simple gesture
to inslide ourselves, cut loose, set sail,
like vessels of the possible
quickened by random surges and squalls,
the way that pollen grains are blown
over wind-swept miles, like miracles.

Love, Like Water

Tumbling from some far-flung corner
into your bathroom alone, to sleeve
a toe, five toes, a metatarsal arch,
it does its best to feign indifference
to the body, but will go on creeping
up to the neck till it's reading the skin
like Braille, though we're certain it sees
under the surface of things and knows
the routes our nerves take as they branch
from the mind, which lately has been curling
in on itself like the spine of a dog
as it circles a patch of ground to sleep.
Now through the dappled window,
propped open slightly for the heat,
through the glass a light rain is composing
the lake it falls into, the way a lover's hand
composes the body it touches—Love,
like water! How it gives and gives, filling up
erosions we didn't know we had, ever so gently
wounding us, wearing them into our side.