THE SUBWAY MOUSE

She lives in thunder.
Foraging in meadows
of steel and concrete
amid slimy pools —
sources unspeakable —
she ekes a living
from human garbage.
And still she lives
and wants to live.

Steel bites steel
and spits fire
over the place
her soft body was
a heart-beat ago
before she disappeared
beneath the rail
into a dank world
far from sun and air
and fragrant rooty earth.

This monster frightens
me and I
belong to the race
that made it.
What must it look
and sound and smell
like to her whose senses
are more acute than mine?
And still she lives
and wants to live.

Zoologists, behaviorists,
biologists, naturalists,
and other ists et al.
would point at her
and say, "Yes, this
phenomenon is illustrative of
the tenacity of life,"
as if LIFE can be divorced
from the creature who possesses
it.

This is her
life. Her
tenacity, and her
industry and her
humility shame me.
Though I know the
answer I ask,
"What have we done to your
world?"
And still she lives
and wants to live.

—Paulette Callen