

Ratios

There are 20 quadrillion
ants upon the Earth,
at least that's what the experts
gauge, and there's two-and-a-half
million for every human.

I don't find that comforting,
that there's fifteen fucking zeroes
after twenty,
that I'm somehow
responsible
for 2,500,000 ants,
feel unsure of what to do
with that amount,

and if my neighbour were to die,
do I care for twice as much?

Ants can look after themselves,
you remind me, speaking of their
diligence, the way they stick together,
that their antennae relay messages
much faster than our texts,
adding they could conquer us
anytime, if they really wanted to,
from their colonies around the house,
that they're content
to simply go about their business,
hard-working communists
that they are.

I feel the need to get away,
where I'd forget about the ants,
do some tourist kind of things,
take in New York City in the fall,
breathe the *crisp* of Brooklyn air,
find all of the varied spots
where *Seinfeld* had been set.

Seated behind your laptop,
you declare there's over
two million rats in NYC,
that it's not as bad as it sounds,
say there's *four* of us
for every *one* of them,

that we could saunter
through Central Park,
extol the spectrum
of the leaves,
catch some vintage jazz
in Greenwich Village,

while we wonder if these
vermin know the ratio,

that it actually falls
within our favour,
every time they migrate from
the sewers, join us on the subway,
risk our baited traps,

if that bite of smelly pizza's

really worth it,
for them, for us,
and the anxious Italian baker,

who never checks what's crawling
around his feet.

Wild Bill McKeen

This village
through which we're
driving is home
to "Wild Bill McKeen"

and though we haven't
a clue who he is—
or was—
his name is on
a banner in the air,
tied to a pair of
streetlights
to make certain
we'll never miss it.

The posted limit
of speed is only
30, and there's
not a lot to look at
so we defer to
our conjectures
as we crawl—

surmise
he's a hockey
player, spent his time
in the penalty box,
a master of slash
and slew foot,
told the refs to

go fuck off,
took a piss
on the Lady Byng.

We then travel
back in time,
think he may have
robbed a coach,
rustled cattle,
outdrew the county
sheriff after starting
a barroom brawl.

We think of synonyms
for *wild*,
saying his hair was
endless, unruly,
he'd grown a beard
from chin to foot,
grunted like an ape,
clutching a raw steak
with savage hands—
tearing off the
pieces with his teeth.

In minutes
we're back
in the country, racing
past the farms
and grazing horses,
say his rep
was overblown,

mere hyperbole,

from the folks
who've led some
pretty boring lives,

that Wild Bill McKeen
took his steaming
cup of coffee
without cream,

once jaywalked
across the road
while it was raining,

returning a *book*
overdue
by a day,

never guessing
he'd be immortal
on a sign,

or better yet—
in a poem,

by someone too lazy
to google
his claim to fame.

Pockets

*I've got one hand in my pocket
and the other one is playin' a piano*

—Alanis Morissette

I can never have enough pockets.
I've bought a dozen cargo pants
for the multifarious pockets
that they boast. No other kinds will do.

I need a pocket for my keys.
I need a pocket for my wallet.
I need a pocket for my covid mask
and ones for the notes I jot—
with a selection of ballpoint pens.

I realize I've embarrassed you on dates—
your slacks without a ripple
while mine are hugely bulged,
sagging from added weight:
my plums and water bottle, my phone and
cigarettes, the pair of Ralph Lauren—
hoping the lenses aren't scratched
by the deodorant I carry just in case.

I bring a bar of Dove, a folded towel with me
when we're at the shopping mall—
their bathrooms are notorious
for their running-out-of-soap,
for their dryers on the fritz,
that hygiene's more important

than my wearing some haute couture.

And I've ketchup when we need it—
the food court cutting costs,
too cheap to include
a packet with our fries.

I want *pockets* within my pockets—
ones that securely snug my
Fisherman's Friend, knowing I can't afford
to drop them on the floor, how germly
that would be, though I have some *sanitizer*
with me if it happens.

You tell me I should get a better system,
like you with your nylon purse, that women
are a walking *pharmacy*,
have ten times more to carry
than us males, have foregone the many
pockets since the Holocene began,
knowing *one* was a pain in the ass:
for the desert kangaroo with precious lading,
the knackered baby within,
hopping along the outback
without a means to ease her burden.