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Rats

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Rats

Marlana B. Fireman

David Duke sees rats
in the early mornings,
just before the sun
rises.

They conspire beneath
his screened-in porch.

When he steps out in
the morning to feel
the weather through his
skin

he hears them chattering beneath his bare feet,
wonders what they're here to do to him.

His white robe flutters
in the humid breeze.

That's all

And he returns

inside, slamming the screen door While he dreams of parentheses and
boot stomps,

he tosses, he turns.

The rats make themselves comfortable and loop

their wiry tails between

his toes as he sleeps.

I love those rats.

They are a certain brand of mink.

Mice chatter at the door

of a house on South

Galvez Street on a Sunday morning.

A little girl opens

the door wide for them,

her bare feet on the cold

tile, crouching down in

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a nightgown to sprinkle
tiny crumbs of Friday's bread
from her pockets. They've never seen a trap, never will.
They chat on the couch
while adults sip Scotch.

In every peripheral
glance, a tail disappears
from his vision, behind a
bookshelf or maybe
through the floorboards.
Measured turns of tight
muscles reveal nothing new, he can't see their eyes
peering from behind
his signed copies of manifestos, flossing their teeth with the pages, those
rats.
Everyone is so
afraid of me, he muses,
but won't step any closer.

In the house on South Galvez Street, Billie Holliday
creates gusts of wind.
Children unabashedly chew on large pieces of steak,
and the great aftershocks
of laughter rattle the window panes.
Cross-legged on the carpet,
newspaper clippings
in neat piles

He swears he can hear
them conspire, but
when the traps are empty,
nibbles appear in
his bread.
Invisible footsteps
stay stubbornly splayed
across the kitchen

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counter.

Lonely roars of
frustration echo
in file cabinets.
I am those rats.

When tears fall on South Galvez Street, they fall together,
And David Duke still sees rats.