Knockout Mouse Model

A knockout mouse is a genetically engineered mouse in which researchers have reactivated, or “knocked out” an existing gene.

Its body & blood are teaching tools; islands of the genome’s archipelago disabled, the conditioned chaos observed. Most won’t grow past the embryo, designed for dissection & microscopic eyes. A scientist spends his lunch hour contemplating the concealed sides of its origami heart.

How to say that suffering should yield something? How to say trespass, hope, progress stowed in the lax body, in one utterance?

Terror is imagining the human body intruded upon in this way, its furniture rearranged & forced to breed children. Someone coming in the night with helix scissors, clipping your eye color, turning off your hearing, switching out your liver for a third kidney, all of it happening slowly, like an old movie reel.

I feel my cells retreat into my fingers ready to defend their information.

In a gentler, cartoonier universe, the mice would be anthropomorphically attractive: knockouts, mice who model. They’d drink on the house wherever they went, twirling their tails flirtatiously.

Tonight, the unstudied, parasitic mice are having the night of their lives, scaring couples on stoops, freeloading meals from granite floors. Deli cats hear them pacing behind walls. The excitement of their tiny footsteps is excruciating.

An off-duty scientist is breeding something for fun, to see what happens if – what happens? Nature’s mice are breaking & entering, slipping under doors with all they need to survive.

Maya Popa