

Running the Traps

Sun up, for what it's worth, puffed out in layers of wool and cotton
I crunch my way through the crisp morning house to greenhouse
to woodshop and back, running the traps, remembering
my father doing much the same: driving out to the creek,
walking along the edge, bending down to pull the traps
from the water heavy with drowned muskrats,
emptying then re-setting the traps, pushing the stakes
to hold them deep in the creekbed mud where the muskrats' burrows
ran into the bank, rolling their bodies in the swales of grass
to get rid of excess water, putting them in the trunk
and driving home, taking them down to the basement
to skin and put their pelts on wire stretchers to cure.

No creeks only dry washes here. and the traps
livetraps for packrats who, if not caught,
build their junkpile nests indoors and drop their pellets
all over the place while they go about their business
gnawing tool handles and electrical insulation,
clipping off vegetables and fruit from the garden and orchard.

Sometimes the traps are empty or hold not a rat but a mouse
or songbird and these I release on the spot.
Sometimes a rattlesnake coiled up inside
where the packrat scent led: those, I leave in the trap,
put them in the pickup and drive a ways away from houses,
then let them out with instructions to not come back
and to tell all their relatives the same.