

Empathy¹

There are moles and there are voles,
two completely different animals--
having trouble telling giraffes from lesser pandas,
why then confuse us with moles?
We voles are bad-ass vegetarians,
handsome champions of our weight class,
keen to comfort other voles in need.
Scientifically proven, we're empathic¹.
Moles, rather, are solitary gormless
worm-eaters with two thumbs on each paw.
They live underground and destroy your lawn—
lurky and vainglorious know-it-alls--
who needs them? Not me, not you.
I will never die in an earthen burrow
choking on a worm calling for my mother.
I will die in a poet's garden on a warm rainy day
at the claws of Sammy, the neighbor's
semi-feral, orange-striped cat
who will carry me home to his family
and lay my tiny grey corpse gently
at their back door,
on the steps by the garbage can,
where I'll be mourned by the four doves
who perch all day on the rusty TV tower
at the corner of the house,
from the days before cable.

¹J.P. Burkett, E. Andari, Z.V. Johnson, D.C. Curry, F.B.M. DeWaal
and L.J. Young. Science, Vol. 351, pp.375-378.

Oxytocin-dependent consolation behavior in rodents.