

The Distal Segment

The Dream of Betty

[*Utetheisa* is a widespread genus of beautiful white moths with black and red spots on their forewings. The larvae feed on various plants in the forget-me-not family (Boraginaceae), including, I seem to remember, forget-me-nots (*Myosotis*). The rather lovely *U. pulchelloides vaga* visits New Zealand each summer from Australia, and lingers here awhile in small colonies.]

Beguiling Betty, lush but lonely
would often sigh and say “If only
some Charming Prince would come and woo me,
impress and pamper and pursue me –
perhaps a poet – an anthologist –
or better still, an entomologist,
or, best of all, a bit of both:
to him I’d surely plight my troth;
an insect-man both tough and tender
would spell immediate surrender.
Because you see,” continued Betty,
“my heart is like the Serengeti,
a place of forces dark and raw,
of nature red in tooth and claw,
a place where wild and hornèd hopes
stampede about like antelopes.”

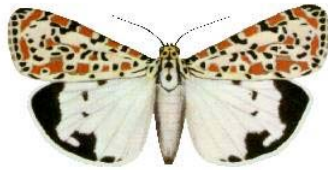
One night to soothe an aching molar
she chewed a piece of gorgonzola,
and then she slept both long and deep,
but oh what dreams assailed her sleep!
Before her wide astonished eyes
appeared a moth of giant size –
a wondrous moth all smooth and white
that glowed and glistened in the night,
a silvery moth with blackish freckles,
a moth with countless crimson speckles,
a moth of might and masculinity
to which she felt a strange affinity.

“How do you do?” the Moth began,
and as it spoke it slowly ran
one soft antenna down her cheek,
which made her feel distinctly weak:
her knees began to shake like jelly;
butterflies fluttered in her belly;
she thought she was about to drown –
thank goodness she was lying down.
“My word,” she said, “you *are* a charmer –
are you my Moth in Shining Armour?”
“It’s possible”, the Moth replied
and snuggled closer to her side,
“I have two names: my friends, you see,
refer to me as Triple G
(which stands for Gorgeous Gaudy Geezer)
but you may call me *Utetheisa*.”

“I’m Betty,” said the bashful maid,
“be nice to me or I’m afraid
I may withhold my full affection
and add you to my moth collection –
(and every moth that I impale
is, by the way, a perfect male).”
The Moth replied “O beauteous Betty,
your hair is thicker than spaghetti:
you clearly have a fertile scalp” –
he brushed it with his labial palp –
“your skin is smooth as vermicelli,
and oh what lovely dark ocelli!”

With admiration and surprise
she gazed into his compound eyes,
and though it seemed forbidden fruiticle
she longed to touch his lustrous cuticle.
The tension was extreme, exhaustin’,
but then, as though he’d read Jane Austen
the Moth, as suave as Mr Darcy,
entwined her in his manly tarsi
and swept her off her feet and flew
away with her to pastures new.
He found a place no-one would notice
with lots of fragrant *Myosotis*
and there, amongst the ferns and mosses,
he kissed her with his long proboscis.

But then at once poor luckless Betty
awoke all feverish and sweaty –
and now her lepidopteran saviour
who'd shown such laudable behaviour
had vanished, nowhere to be seen –
alas the gorgeous Moth had been
(she realized with consternation)
a cheese-induced hallucination.



Utetheisa pulchelloides