

the beast goes to tea

Dear people, friends of friends of mine:
thank you for shaking my hand, for patting my head.
Some would think me dead

but you have noticed, clever you,
the hand which you have shaken
is warm, my head upraised--

perhaps I don't move enough:
one of you is not sure
that I am here;

passing him a cup of tea, I nod
graciously.

Note: I did not wink or smile

too widely, baring my teeth.
My eyes move quickly, concealed
behind my gently half-closed lids,

my hands move not at all,
my lips form slow, silent words
so low and long

you cannot hear; a love song
to you, kind smooth friends
of my distant friend

twice removed.
I sing to you
of your white skin, fine fur, and lacquered nails.

I sing to you in praise
of your crustless sandwiches
freely passed to me

to see if that's the sort of food I like.
Thank you
for not slapping my hand

when I reached out.
I thought you would,
so I took what I could quickly, watching you closely

my kind, swift relatives.
Thank you
(you're smart)

for not asking me to join
in the race
after tea.

I am too rough, too slow,
for your slip slide speed.
Your flash frightens me.

Thanks for the tea. No,
I won't stay.
You're so kind; I've been good

but I growl sometimes.
Thank you for shaking my hand,
and letting me go.

by Shirley Tillotson