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Among the Stars, Eidolons, The Meeting, The Shopper

William Heyen

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Four Poems

WILLIAM HEYEN

Among the Stars

I was stopped at a red light past which
the moon shone full silver & low.
A cattle trailer pulled beside me,
dozens of animals behind slats,
pushing their noses through, intoning
soft sounds that sounded like home, home....

They were on their way to the moon,
or weren't. They were on their way
into your own bloodstream with ketchup & fries,
or weren't. Amazing,
the life they lead—timelessness,
pasture & asphalt, fear, & being fed....

That night, I followed them for miles,
stunned. An odor of straw & urine,
but sometimes their trailer seemed to hold
only disembodied pairs of eyes, aglow.
I saw their driver dreaming by radio
along our planetary road to home, home.

Eidolons

I've got a Kwik-Wash discount coupon
so idle in line a while to take my turn

to try these new machines, sewn
like pacemakers into the heart of town,

open seven days from dawn to dawn
until our water fails, or power,

which browns out regular every summer
across this 21st-century hemisphere...

but they've rinsed the lead from gasoline
because we couldn't buy with half a brain,

couldn't buy anything with half a brain,
but I inhale deep & then again

to take my place in our benzene ring.
Is that the sun or moon descending

over the row of metal stalls?—
I guess I'm a little dizzy, pal,

I think to mention to the guy who motions,
but don't. It's just old age, or weather,

& once inside the suds & shower
I'll be hunky-dory. I love my wheels

clean as a whistle, so try to whistle,
but only this melodious hiss

escapes my lips. I hand my coupon over,
& three additional bucks. "Lower your aerial,"

he rotes, "roll your windows up." The nozzles
remind me of something I can't remember,

maybe cattails at a pond somewhere when
I was young, or something too obscene to mention.

The Meeting

Long Island Sound, Crane's Neck
 the horizon behind me, I drifted
 by rowboat to trenchline: creation
 indented the seafloor

to further than anchors could fathom:
 my heaviest sinkers were feathers,
 my wire billowed outward but down
 to something below me I wanted....

Line, hook, & squidweight
 arcing away from my sight
 into water so green it was black,
 into time when the Island was born

when my bait was struck
 as though by a swimming rock
 that swept it under my boat
 to the cave of the glacier & back,

but I reeled my fear with the line
 upward in blood when I cut
 a wristvein by whipped wire,
 but won the visible meeting

& hauled the six-foot killer
 into an oarlock
 where its jaws ground metal to blood,
 & teeth broke, & my set hook

snapped.... The creature rolled over
 in the flat water & blended,
 turned its walleyes upward,
 almost milky, almost opal,

but black-flashed, empty,
almost translucent, blank,
nature's gaze without language,
our eyes lit by the same sun,

as our stare went wild
from glacier to brain until
I touched my blood to the oarlock
in regret, & the shark descended.

The Shopper

For as long as they last,
steaks of blue whale calf,
&, marked up by half,
filet of condor's breast,

but when I ate the dodo,
I could not ingest
its gentleness, & trust.
Genes lost voyages ago

sometimes seem to snag
in my human heart,
eidolons of Easters past,
but passenger pigeons' eggs

wink in a vanished series,
& the ivory bill cries
in the vacuum of its skies
not at all. Memories

of disincarnate creatures
toll along these aisles,
a great auk smiles
darkly in its freezer

in my human skull,
& my cart follows yours
to checkout counters
cast before us like a spell. . . .

Teach me, Lord,
the evolved wisdom of species
returned to dens & aeries
where all Your mystical dead

still dwell. I cannot find
my daily bread for sale
in this beribboned mall
thronged with the polymer sound

of generic birds on plastic limbs
in plastic trees. I need
to fathom what I'll need
to buy. It's almost closing time

for animals in children's crafts
& artwork on display.
Ruby frogs gray
in anaconda forests

in endangered rain. Before long,
only mutant insects will hover
over the human undersong
because, despite, unless, therefore

this mess of dugong tongue
& memorial prayer,
as the last shopper
clears his choke to sing.