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Among the Stars, Eidolons, The Meeting, The Shopper

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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
indent 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.