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Love Song: Accidental Species

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Charles O. Hartman

Love Song: Accidental Species

Remember when we were introduced
to the only man in Oregon who had seen *Diomedea*
cauta, the White-Capped Albatross also known

as Shy, whose normal range is deep air deep
off the continental shelf, and spoke of the Harlequin Duck,
of *Histrionicus histrionicus*: Rather small, he said;

mostly silent. You looked at him strangely. He said
in his quiet voice that the eggs are creamy, half
a dozen strong, the downies

ready at hatching to swim rapids and negotiate small falls.
Already we felt competent to any falls. Whatever
the only man in Oregon who knew

the shy *Diomedea* has touched, in the way of birds,
has turned to gold. He cannot eat them, he told us,
fixing dull eyes on your cracker thick with paté.

The thought of open season gives him agoraphobia. He feels
at home down among grasses in the salt marsh, and is afraid
in simple ways, like the scholar of history who has turned old.

Because he is obvious, he is written off: that was the message
of his soft face. He had his moment, when the long
campaign to save the Peregrine jibed

with somebody's sudden sentiment for fur seals; then
the rest moved on to whales and left him to the falcons, high
and dry: *Diomedea* no more use to him

than *Histrionicus* whom if the truth be known—I say in your
ear

that is a shard of heron's egg and was
even that evening rounded like a home—whom, I say,

he has never glimpsed and might not certainly know
from the Common Merganser that keeps house on the sea.

His dreams
begin these days with *Limosa haemastica*, Hudsonian

Godwit, and unfold by stages only a fool would mock
toward Heloise's Hummingbird, whirring among the Mexican
clusters of heavy blossom whose name he never forgets,

a little beyond him where he glides
freely forward murmuring Atthis, Athos,
Attis, in the broken dawn.