Love Song: Accidental Species

Charles Hartman
Connecticut College, cohar@conncoll.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/engfacpub

Part of the Poetry Commons

Recommended Citation

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English Department at Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Connecticut College. For more information, please contact bpancier@conncoll.edu.
The views expressed in this paper are solely those of the author.
Charles O. Hartman

Love Song: Accidental Species

Remember when we were introduced to the only man in Oregon who had seen *Diomeda 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, *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 *Diomeda* 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: *Diomeda* 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 *Limosoa baemastica*, 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.