

# TO THE LIQUOR STORE WITH HAYDEN CARRUTH

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Even at your age, you are as thirsty  
as Li Po at sunset, picturing endless herons  
with the lake's *orange tongues leaping in the corner,*  
  
so we make way, with *the winter of illness ending,*  
down main street,  
suffering through what was left  
  
of that pitiful hangover, the dreadful *crescent tipped beyond*  
*the dark tree-burst* of morning. The Oldsmobile  
  
that burns oil and rocks violently  
like a *cat that starts to throw up,*  
back and forth, *convulsing and gagging—*  
  
you think *Chicago was bleak, God knows,*  
*but sweet,* well, what is this cow town,  
anonymous as its barren azaleas,  
before the students crawl out from beneath  
their drowsy squalor? Hayden, you wince  
a devil grin as we take the corner sharply—  
past where *Omar and Tu Fu were drinking vodka*

*and warm beer—eyes glowing hellfire, you struggle  
like Ahab with the broken heater's knob.*

Coins drip from your pockets like coils of wire, the bloom  
of *that empty treble roll* unfurling on the seasick floorboard  
as you growl *I can afford awful. But, at least I can  
afford it* and mumble something about  
the five stages of death as we slide into the parking space.

*Italicized words are from Carruth's Scrambled Eggs & Whiskey.*