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## Paradise in Wal-Mart

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# Paradise in Wal-Mart

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*Mary Dengler*

Tired as Odysseus after razing Troy,  
I steered my basket, big as Noah's ark,  
Through waves of Wal-Mart air to isles  
Of tiring fruit and gaudy, plundered piles  
Of sweatshop-manufactured goods.  
Hungry now, I slowed my bark to read  
The signs, ingredients, promises of health  
And life concealed in every bite. Then like  
A shaft of sunlight unexpectedly at dusk  
When night is settling in, a gaze from somewhere  
Drew my vision through a maze of carts  
To rest on two large pairs of eyes, as dark,  
Deep, and quiet as the River Lethe in  
Virgil's underworld.

Solemn as priest and mourner at death knell  
Or daily prayer, they sat, heads bowed,  
Eyes raised, hands round the bar of mama's cart,  
A tiny girl of maybe four, a tinier boy.  
Mirthless, motionless, they stared.  
They didn't smile—they simply stared  
Into my eyes, not at my clothes  
Or shoes, not critically assessing, summing up,  
Not to appease, or please, no categories—  
gender, race or age—just sage-like interest  
So profound, so deep, it pulled my thought  
To ancient days in books and dreams, to dew  
And hush of giant scented ferns.

Forgetful, in this Yeatsian faeryland,  
Of task and time, I turned away. In look,  
They hadn't felt the Fall.  
Unable to resist a backward glance,  
Not unlike Eve when all her way was barred,  
I found the eyes, like ancient guardians, attached,  
Inured to shoppers, baubles, aids to sin.

One inward look, from months away, restores  
The faded features of an aging day or face,  
With all it might have been.