FLIGHT

Loren Eiseley, the well-known author, is Curator of Early Man at the University Museum. This poem "Flight 857" is reprinted by permission of Charles Scribner's Sons from NOTES OF AN ALCHEMIST. Copyright © 1972 Loren Eiseley. Soon to be published by Charles Scribner's Sons.

Nosing in through a blizzard over Denver at thirty thousand feet
I think what the earth covers at Lindenmeier there far away to the north
those men we never found
of ten millennia ago
but still
finding the heavy-headed beasts of the gone time, finding
in the end
how short one's own existence,
one pauses.

I suppose, beyond the low clouds and the snowfields,
lie the marks of the trenches where forty years ago we dug
and we found them, found
the Ice Age long-horned bison,
the deadly point buried still
in the massive vertebra.

We proved something:
they write about it in books now
but that lost doorway of snow
through which the hunters were enticed to venture will eventually
close behind us also.

Staring north through the falling flakes,
the hills invisible,
I think just once of the moment
when the fluted chalcedony
dropped into my hand
but really
I know now
it should never have been resurrected
any more than these wheels and wings and electronic voices
should ever again be lifted
from oblivion.

I hope they do not find us:
the point should remain in the vertebra,
the offering by the dead child in the cave,
the pterodactyl in the slate,
the poet in the lost book,
the singer as song in the grass.

Why must we usurp
the autumn leaf's prerogative
or the cancellations of running water
or the erasures of the dust?

Like the hunters, we will leave deadly slivers of glass
where they left flint, the metal will oxidize.

We will be dangerous if found
by anything wiser
than a field mouse.

I hope he will take it upon himself to betray no secrets
nor resurrect even
that little artifact
the mouse trap
lest it be
disastrously reactivated.

It would take a glacier to pulverize us completely to chalk dust,
but even at Lindenmeier
the hunters had the grace to tiptoe
away with the last mammoth.

We never found them, only their flints.
So be it forever with us
and all those who come after.
Amen.