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“The Recidivist”, by Maria Jastrzębska

The Recidivist

What shall we do about *Atylotus rusticus*?
His translucent wings let in green sun.

Fifteen dipterists couldn't give us an answer.
Sweeping the air with their nets they raced

round our meadow, took notes, exclaimed
then let him go. We still feel responsible.

There's Halbert who worked hard all his life.
You can see ripples of pain across his ribs.

He stamps his hooves, swishing his tail,
as *Atylotus* saws at his skin with mandibles.

What shall we do about *Atylotus rusticus*?
He's almost as rare as a golden eagle.

The great crested newt's already gone,
since the farmer next door filled the ponds

and hedgehogs keep disappearing fast –
folk complain they drink cows' udders dry.

Nowadays walking through bluebell woods
by our house we hear rifle shots ring out;

sand lizards, wheatears, badgers and voles,
are next in line as the A27 roars past.

We want to give *Atylotus* a chance
but can't bear to watch Halbert wince

while *Atylotus* crawls over his eyes
or dances along his spine.

Maria Jastrzębska

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