

GAVIN YUAN GAO

MAGPIE

A hole in a waistcoat. Like a mouth starved of speech.
Hole in the night. Like a mind flung open, an aviary. A hot hush.
And the moon slinks through the oak's topmost leaves, nosy
as an ermine, searing a lilac-tinted window on the back
of a nightjar's eye. She wades and wades, a hostess, ankle-deep
in herself, and hates the aliases foisted upon her: disc
of meniscus: face with no cheekbone: dinner plate the color
of a robin's egg. Hole in the window in the noble house called
Long Ago, raided and seized by the night. Night the usurper,
the self-taught dramaturg donning the injured magpie's waistcoat.
Out of the hole drops a certain suspense, a curtain of smoke,
the contour of a footstep just before it's planted. I've heard
that the worst hurt often lies unreachable by sight. Sight
like a failed boat that a craggy shore resists, as though the shore
wished to spit the boat back to the eye. Beneath the boat, behind
the eye, between the oak's bedraggled leaves: a sudden sense
of loss, photographed by the mind. The mind like a lens
or the soft curve of a palm, upturned, perfect for collecting
commas of rain, because the night is lonely. So lonely it wants
to be punctuated. It wants to be. Wants to populate the mind
with nothing but itself. This is when the moon blows in
through the attic window, filthy with a thief's delight, blows in
like a pin-stabbed balloon, a thin flap, red as marrow, and floats
over the mind as though presiding over a stream or a blessing.
A christening where the water of consciousness pours
through the sieve formed by the baptizer's fingers, pours
from the lily-throated jug the moon holds and tilts in her pollened
hands. I offer the moon's light a thimble's worth of water—
her light shot with silver, if you could call the voice of a luna moth
silver. I bring her a moment of clarity carefully chosen from my life—
though like the thimble, it's not much of a life—to charm her
out of her trance-like dance the way a magpie might be bribed
out of its injured look, its chafed flesh, to step and stand
as a treble clef in a songbook. In and out, in and out, the boat
rows itself, denied by the shore. My mind is a boat, a thin flap
of marrow moon. All night, it lies unmoored, thimble in water.