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, thimbled in water.