

Magritte

by Bill Yarrow

I pick Magritte up from the bottom of a star.
He is desolate with lavender.
"Who is it?" he moans, touching my wrist
with his wing. I help him to his feet,
careful of his cedar leg.
Behind his grimace he is smiling.
Like a man drowning in warm water.

We climb through a busted window.
Magritte cuts his arm. Blood drops out
like rusty pennies. A mermaid
standing on wet gravel waves to us.
He doffs his bowler.
The black paraffin that fills his head
spills out.
This always happens.

"What's in your palm?" he asks.
She opens it.
It's a baby oyster
covered in cobweb.

The day's as gray as a century of salmon eggs.
One sun-pocked building catches my attention.
"No," he says. "Under this arch."
We cobble our way through old streets,

pass vegetable merchants, occasional hunchbacks,
daughters yet to be consecrated.

Arriving at the pier I see a sailboat in dead wind.
"That is pathos," Magritte says,
pointing to a barnacle.

She folds and unfolds her kerchief
folding her eyes in her lap.
Her fingers are long and drawn and thin
like hollow reeds or scabbards.
She is all meekness, all pastel.
We see her at the scaffold
darkening in the air
where the clouds are heaving like minstrels
and the hawks watch as they fly.
Her majesty derives from open clouds
yet she derives from twilight.
We salute her in tandem
and gasp as her voice rises
and rises into our eyes.

That evening, stepping over lengthening shadows,
we are in Toledo where the moon
appears as the white bone of a rose,
where four clouds create the horizon,
where four sounds echo through the trees.
At the curtain of the city
we come across a thin strand of finger
belonging to El Greco.

"Give that to the woman,"
says Magritte.

"She has more need of the digit
than we."

And on that day, the Creator said to Speech, "What makes your skin
flat
like the river? I shall give you wounds to perform in your flesh
so that you may never be plain to me." And He was pleased
with the lesion which He called Silence and touched His lips to the
sky.
That place, today, is forbidden to birds.

Now the tendon of God is stretched to plain view.
A million onions have been carried to the mirror.
Long birds fly in broken formation.
All is amethyst and milk.
Without warning the white sword
crashes down on orthodoxy.
The sky splits open like Hell's abortion.
A Saracen sun advances on Magritte.

