

Abduction

by Dennis Mahagin

Ed Munch,
of Massapequa, suffering much,
with fibroids in the solar plexus,
half-moon cysts and
then some;
with bald head thrust
between knotty knees, on the floor
of the sick room—
(*Ballard Hospice*, bars
on stained glass)—
Edward with jowls the color of sunflowers,
advances upon end-stage liver failure;
tossing his lunch on the tiles, Ed begs,
between shallow rasp, heave
and retch, for egress,
for egress.

Only a year ago
he'd been stocking shelves
at a Pensacola gallery
when the illness bloomed,
a scab on his wrist, which he picked,
and rubbed, like a scratch-off
lottery ticket: he bled
in sidereal streaks,
like Pollock upon the glossy
cover of a Nolde print; he swooned
and stumbled from the curator's room,
a dozen slack-jawed stares
in his wake.

Only a month ago

they'd been pumping him
with Dilaudid at night
to adjust his palette for what
was coming; in the soft lamp light
he watched his long fingers sprout
pink caterpillar fuzz; knuckles morphed
into hinges for Monarch butterflies,
and Edward laughed,
thinking to simply shake
his bone break
fever and jaundice
like a common
cold.

Today, they've taken
the opiates away, inexplicably
in favor of time-released Interferon
with no magical properties,
better for the injured spleen
while squeaky-toed nurses come
and go in white shifts,
with pursed lips and a practiced
judgment behind
professional eyes,
they've come to watch
Edward die.

"Are you alright, Mr. Munch?" one
of them inquires; she stacks the bedpan
brimming with cocoa-hued stool
atop an untouched cafeteria tray;
she lets the plates clatter
with a matter of fact hate,
simply because she can.
"Can you stand?" she asks,

"we need to get you back
in the bed."

"I was a painter," Edward says,
hours later, to the quiet night, quaking
then, at the sudden sight of a pint-sized
extra-terrestrial intruder
with almond tear ducts
and celestial breath plumes, arcing
like comet tails through the pool
of moonlight in his tiny room:

the creature nods
appreciatively, at a charcoal landscape
etching Munch had made in a moment
of lucidity, one afternoon last month,
or was it the month before?

"I saw you," Munch whispers,
"on the bridge, the vanishing point,
the most innocent eyes ever in the
universe. And I wonder... is it done?
You know I've already begun a series
in copal, called Star Spatter Deep
Space, and I am so very ready
to be gone from this place ...
any time, really, any
time you are."

