

DARK DAYS THE MAGPIE BRINGS

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I.

Maestro of sorrow,
you survey Golgotha.

pre-thrashing rain,
decisive thunder.

From the third to ninth hours,
your throat bestows no serenade,

no comfort, no note of hope
for that Creator crucified

beneath a sky, the dark
shimmer of your indifference.

On this day, of all the birds
you alone are silent.

Only when *It is finished*,
does your harsh *ch-tak* echo

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centuries. You do not migrate
to the tomb. Do not rise

to a horizon filled
with dawn and song.

II.

And yet, an unrepentant thief,
through time you keep stealing

all that glistens and glimmers
as in Rossini's *La Gazza Ladra*,

when the innocent servant girl,
also condemned for someone else's crimes

(yours), nearly plummets from the gallows.
O dark deceiver—a stolen spoon clutched

in your beak, tailwinds of grief
trailing behind you—confess

your larceny. Caw her name, *Ninetta*!
For all this, I do not forgive you. Never

will I herald you sacred, never
proclaim a flock of your kin good.

Even now, your red eyes track death;
your purple feathers shine dirge.

*Dark days the magpie brings,
dark days he sings.*

THE OTHER ONE
—*THE FALLEN ANGEL*, ALEXANDER CABANEL, 1847

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Except for the eyes, he, too, is beautiful,
maybe more so because he's so familiar,
or so familiar to what we desire:
the muscled limbs, the taut abs,
the wild hair, the tear of regret,
even the two clasped hands
pushing against each other as if
squashing, grinding, then recreating
a miniature world which he'll pitch
into the black hole of free will
the second we choose to stop
staring at his eyes,
maniacal in their intense force
to blast to smithereens all his creator's
good intentions.

His auburn, slanted eyebrows—
arrows that demand our attention—
keep pointing past the sprawling vine
and just to the right of our peripheral vision,
so much so that we forget the raised wings
and the calm pastel backdrop of celestial beings—
the happy, obedient ones—joyfully gliding
their way across a paradise
that looks a lot like sky,
like the one above me now,
slowly sinking toward
sunset and shadow.

NESTING DOLL

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That small one inside another and another, another and another, rosy cheeks and blooming belly of the Russian

Matroyshka doll. Or the Kelly Green family from Ireland:
clan of wee leprechaun inside sister with clover between

her braids, inside brother with Aran sweater, inside
mother in step dance dress and father with Irish

walking hat. Or the star-spangled elf hiding
inside a toy maker, nestled safely inside

a round reindeer, then a fat snowman,
a Mrs. Claus, and finally pot-bellied

Santa: nothing left to unscrew, no
surprise identity to reveal, no

child to birth, just solid wood—
at last—without elaborate

design or meaning, and
not anything like the tiny

girl in kimono, lost
from her larger selves,

and leftover from your
childhood, Mother,

as she rests on the sill
above my kitchen sink,

alone, revealing
nothing, not

even a
memory.