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Poetry: Two Poems

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Two Poems

By Beverly Tokarz

PORTRAIT OF JOHN L.

Five years back,
in a spring so wet
even the rocks turned green
in the constant rain,
I found an old man's face
lighting my mornings.
I see him still.

He stood in a square of light
when I carried my paints
into the place
for a ten o'clock class.
A bright white nurse
whisked me down a corridor,
wishing me luck and patience.
John followed at a distance
examining the floor.

Twelve people in a small, pale room
bent in concentration or despair.
I made my mouth tell life
in the dull, stale air,
flew lines across a page
with yellow oil color.

He'd watch the careful motion
and repeat the pattern,
his long, knotted fingers
gripping the brush.
His amazed face, lined better
than any master's drawing,
said life still mattered.
Color by color that long, wet spring
we made the only magic
that remained.

Once he imagined
a boat on a green-gray sea
rough with motion,
heading somewhere
he could not say quite where.

Now I picture the sea
grown pale in his eyes,
hear him ask in a whisper
if I've seen his young brother
walking up from the cornfield
heading in for supper.

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY, MY COBALT ANGEL

It's our anniversary, Marc Chagall.
Do you remember, dancing
in your blue painter's heaven,
how we met?

I was sleeping, lulled
from the yellow day
glowing around my head
like a searchlight
into some gray avenue
looking like the day after World War One.
Apathetic sidewalks crackled
like tempers. So tired.
A little rain, I think, was falling.

My paintings were all at home
under the dusty bed
gathering moths and sorrow.
Here were no colors,
no definite boundaries of line
to rejoice in.
Out of a neutral mist
you (who is this?) were suddenly there:
overcoat, no hat, old man's face
clear and smooth as a lake,
only with rippled brow.
Who spoke first? Was it you,
out of that space you earned by patience?
Was it me, out of my sojourner's
loss and hope?

Words, never precise enough to help,
have evaporated now
into that dream's smog.
Still, you stand like a monument.
"Make your life,
build it like a painting.
It is a something we must all make.
Make it yours." That is what
your eyes, full of light, said.

Somewhere, colors were waiting for you.
I woke into heavy orange air.
Beyond my window, the wan city
glowed in the light of the departing sun
like a painting flown into pure color.