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Introduction



Painting by Paige Barclay

ae reiff

I Wisdom

There was an angel in the height
Who took a long roll, then clouds
Were lifted. Under my wing was the light
Of the presence within

Eternal life.

I floated to the third dimension
In a cube of yellow hair.
With the eternal somersaults of light
I caught apple blossoms as they fell to earth,

They were so fair.

A point in the line of stellar trajectories,
I was mars when you landed me,
Solar fire when you felt me,
I was on the outermost planet

Astride the gloom.

I was historical persons,

Signed the Declaration.

I was the centurion who loved his servant.

I fought underground

Where I died.

I rose in mist from a stream in the morning,

I surrounded the fragrance of new mown hay,

I was shaping clouds for evening,

Choosing colors, the first rose, the purple

End of the day.

I was a last leaf in fall

Until I was alive in the redbud tree.

I nested all winter with waxwings.

Joined early robins in wet hills

Under cedar.

Who do you think I am while you are reading?

When the word takes inspired flame I ignite.

I am the word in all of its meanings,

Put into sentences I leap up, oh wisdom,

I incarnate.

Where will I be when you are seeking me?

Shall I stand upon the ground and smile invisibly?

Will you think to look for me in a bad man?

Will you think I am in your heart,

Inconsolable?

I was the question of a trusting child,

I fought back an answering reply,

I was the disillusioned, the rejected heart,

Though I yearned, this also I did not embrace.

I wept.

I ripened the fig on its branch, turned a pear
Green to gold. I was polishing apples
With my long reach. Filling the fertile seed
With two weeks' growth, I prepared the ground
For my harvest.

Am I so selfish in my care for the living?
I rode the seed in the belly of a bird,
Was cast out, this lime made me fertile,
I spread in groves, a dozen at once, solitary
In vacant fields.

I cared for the man whose ashes were scattered,
Could reproduce him at once from a speck.
I will reassemble the billions, bring them all with me,
I have not forgotten, but my hand is stretched out
To the living.

I wait for the moment when you are along,
When all the seeds of my experience have grown.
I am around you, under you and above you,
Now is the moment to take me at last
To your heart's home.

I crept with luminous fire up trunks and branches,
As the moon rose I set forth with the ow,,
Crested tall grasses, hunted
Till the mouse froze, dove with talons,
But not for food.

I was the living stone, from my pores water came.
My body rested back in the hill,
I set the flowing cup upon my table.
I am also a quarry, men come to set me
In their foundations.

I am water, the Wood, the tree,
The rock, the mortar and the building stone,
I make myself of myself myself,
I am in hands, brains, plans, trades,

Who is like me/

I rise in realization of my own being,
Take root in the spreading ground that I filled,
I am awake, synapse of one idea,
Palpable, real, breathe awhile in joy,

My discovery.

While they search for me they know me not,
I come to my own if they will have me,
It is a little thing, I make a man hungry
And I am his bread, thirst and he drinks me,

Filled to the brim.

I tire not easily when I shake the mountains,
I appeared at noon time myself transparent,
I cast no shadow when I took on flesh.
What are these wounds in my hands? If they ask me
I tell them.

I was inspiration for a thousand works,
I held the chisel, I taught the eye,
I was discovery in night, in the day
I remembered myself, let the notes play
From an ink pen.

I am the blind poet, sent to justify
The ways of God to men. I was in the garden,
Before the flood, I was alive
And I live forevermore and
I come quickly.

I was reading a poem, I was the sound
And the voice of the speaker, I sent
For ears, for hearts to fill, I took
The ringing of bells, set verse,

Then I was glad.

I was glad when the core of light opened
And I saw myself coming for my own,
I wore the white robe of day in its dawning,
The sun was an ethereal circle when I stopped

The earth's turning.

Do you know me as apocalypse,
Here where I once turned worlds to improve them?
So you have me alpha and omega, so extreme
For one who turns a plane, applies some polish,

Adjusts a spin.

I was an inherited son, traveled the fir country,
Whence I came when my time was fulfilled.
No different from the foal to its mother, I came
For milk and was feasted, I was loved thus

By my own.

I was still in the vineyard, grown with the grape
In the foot of the vintage, pruned with the vine,
I was harvested in wheat heads, sown in the field,
But even as the feasting began I was

Time's fruition.

I was ages growing, root grew, bud opened,
Have flowered in the century of history,
The stone, wood, spring, well,
Vine and stalk of my being

Just incomplete.

I need a loan from the hearer, must hear the sound

Of hands clapping, this bright adoration,

Hold first blessing over heads made abundant,

Harvest bins fill bursting, thus consumed,

And this by singing.

Michael Lee Johnson

The Redemption

My eyes green
are 2 glass windows
into the past.
I keep the blinds
pulled down tight.
Carnal knowledge
is a Biblical definition of sin.
I live in darkness,
the shame of those early years.
I pull myself out
redemption in old age,
a savior,
before the grave,
I flatter myself
in a mirror, no reflection.

Alberta Bound (V4)

I own a gate to this prairie
that ends facing the Rocky Mountains.
They call it Alberta-
trails of endless blue sky
asylum of endless winters,
the hermitage of indolent retracted sun.
Deep freeze drips haphazardly into spring.
Drumheller, dinosaur badlands, dried bones,
ancient hoodoos sculpt high, prairie toadstools.
Alberta highway 2 opens the gateway of endless miles.
Travel weary, I stop by roadsides, ears open to whispering pines.
In harmony North to South
Gordon Lightfoot pitches out a tune-
"Alberta Bound."
With independence in my *veins*,
I am a long way from my home.

Tiny Sparrow Feet (V2)

It's calm.

Cheeky, unexpected.

Too quiet.

My clear plastic bowls
serves as my bird feeder.

I don't hear the distant
scratching, shuffling

of tiny sparrow feet,

the wing dances, fluttering, of a hungry
morning's lack of big band sounds.

I walk tentatively to my patio window,
spy the balcony with my detective's eyes.

I witness three newly hatched
toddler sparrows, curved nails, mounted
deep, in their mother's dead, decaying back.

Their childish beaks bent over elongated,
delicately, into golden chips, and dusted yellow corn.

Beach Boys, Dance

They dance and drum to their songs.
Boogaloo Boys, Beach Boys, still band members die.
Revolts and rebellion always end in peace, left for the living.
Even the smoking voice of Carl Wilson dies
with a canary inside his cancerous throat called "Darlin."
Dennis Wilson, hitchhiking, panhandling with the devil Charles Manson,
toying with heroin, he's just too much trouble to live.
Check their history of the living and the dead;
you will find them there, minor parts and pieces
musical notes stuck in stone wall cracks,
imbibe alcohol, cocaine.
Name's fade, urns toss to sea
dump all lives brief memories,
bingo, no jackpot.

Emalisa Rose

High noon hyperbole

Rendezvous rhymes
cloud cabarets and the
butterfly shrugs off
the caterpillar.

I wrote you six poems;
but you hadn't responded,

preferring a face, as we
fade out the summer, with
colder days coming.

But, we'll just feed the sparrows
for now,

diverting our eyes from the three
penny opera, having scripted us
into it, latter days April.

Feeding the sparrows for now -

'neath this old battered bench

high noon hyperbole

Fifth Street, Delancey.

Sweeping them up

“More will come down as you sweep them away,” Tino says.

“They’re letting us know, it’s that time again.”

In a frenzy of Fall’s first forsaken,
they dazzle the canvas of Summers
last lawns.

I counted five, then turned away.

The first blooms of April, struggling
to cling to their legacy.

The house they petitioned against

The house facing left of the park and
ride, where the weeds grow most lonely
and those three defunct trees, barren
branched, year after year.

When Mary moved in, there was much
opposition; her and her mixed group of
seven.

“Strange, something’s brewing there,”
Jane in house 6, interjects when I tell her
they’re really quite nice, just yearning to
live and assimilate.

The following April, the group home
moved out and the once defunct trees,
now seen blooming leaves in a magic’s
magenta.

Annest Gwilym

Three Lions 11 July 2021

The first time in 55 years
I keep the supply of beer coming
cold, not cool, as he likes it

Losing puts him in a bad mood
in the debris of my life
sometimes I win, mostly I lose

From the kitchen, his reddening face
the pile of cans, like a mini citadel
grows on the coffee table

The pizza isn't right
Undercooked he says
not enough pepperoni

After extra time it's penalties
he's on the edge of his seat
then it's all over

The cans kicked off the table
I hope you're happy
you Welsh bitch

The crunch of fist on cheekbone
a penalty he doesn't miss

In the Immensity of Night

Things with invisible hands
unlatch the doors unseen

Creep on silent feet
around my floating bed

Tap their long, strong nails
on my wooden headboard

Whisper poetry in my sleep
which evaporates at dawn

A crinkle of leaves gathers
at the base of the bed

While the sea laps at my front door
lost and miles from home

Baby crabs with tiny pincers
knock, want to enter

The herons are watching
as gulls tear candy-floss clouds

Outside is dangerous, static-filled
inside is better

I pull the duvet under my chin
I think I'll stay here

George Freek

SQUIRRELS (After Tu Fu)

The day grows shorter,
those distant clouds
will soon be overhead,
bringing rain or snow.
The flowers will be dead.
The snow will disappear,
but it will come again.
Flowers and squirrels
are soon past their prime.
As I drink my wine,
I watch the squirrels madly
gathering food for winter.
Do they know life is short?
Do they stare at the stars
and think of eternity?
Are their thoughts
as meaningless as mine
when I look at them
and they look back at me?

AN EXCUSE FOR NOT SPEAKING TO A FRIEND (After Chu Hsi)

A breeze rustles the leaves
at the edge of the bay.

The moon and the stars make
night almost as clear as day.

On the lake a loon calls,
from very far away.

The lake is now a calm desert.

But tonight a strong wind
will blow. Waves will beat
like enraged fists against
the rocks. I feel this anger
is more real than the calm.

My friend says we must
look for the good.

I find it hard to believe.

Forgive me, my friend,
as I watch a worm,
stranded in dead grass,
writhing in agony,
until it finally reaches
its predetermined end.

I DREAM NEAR THE BLUE RIVER (After Mei Yao Chen)

A goose floats on the river,
so near I can almost touch him.
In an ugly mood, he honks at me.
On this wind-blown day,
leaves fall, denuding the trees.
I can't see that wind,
but I can feel its breeze.
We can only know
what we see. But who sees
the atoms in a cup of tea?
Life is a brief fantasy.
Clouds drift past,
and disappear. The river
wanders ambiguously,
until it's suddenly swallowed
by a cold, indifferent sea.
I gaze into it and see,
staring with puzzled eyes,
a vague reflection of me.

J. D. Nelson

rattlesnake flange

a clean vapor trailway
a spider taste test in the morning

when there is a color of the thought
the scorpion's brain is a weapon of the lost night

the minor mirror
we need a new language for the glass

that fear is the never in the icebox tomorrow
the wheatgrass weapon

that was the period of barn grafting
to eat the eyes

I left my supplies on earth
so I am eating moon rocks

we walked right thru the wall to the other room
where the people are living as pilgrims

the happy apple
here is a nickel of the oink

your corn was a q*bert

in the creek of the colorful ink
the crying apple is the noun

to splash with that feather fat
the power blank is the copper of the coil

I was the crane of the stomach
I was the pawn of the apple

to learn of the candid rocks
cereal milk for bats

the name of the serious flame of the cay
the skull of the barn

a rook in the deli

that half is the name of the world
that burger is the northern laugh

we are in the werewolf forest
we are in the green city, too

the talking box of the vermont rose
the filtered numb angle of the soccer road

in the tree, brains are parched
the secret bird had a raspberry cough

the seven of the ape

the elbow is a corn of the power to mash a night of the mug
to lose that headlined asterisk

a portal
a pillar

and that glass is the shadow of the world

Joshua Martin

Arms to highlight dynamics

First consider idiosyncratic
articulation & then
sacrifice
novelty

exegesis in light of utilization:
the latter
prevented
embrace
of painful
pedagogy

hermeneutics utilized
messianic reinterpretation
shields the self from evaluation
discontinuity of
continuity fathoms
articles of pretense
& tendencies to construct
testimonial epistles

regarding interaction turns
pursuits into polemics
w/ empathy they are described
before raging inferno warning
and laments
the rebuke of
the two deeds
demonstrate witness
based on remarks
concludes discourse
& completely codified
opponents

Dark meat deboning

I end up plastered to overdue maelstrom
teaching contraception to schismatic cardinals
because function is a tremendous sacrifice
I experienced with bread & water panic
striking gas afternoons dotting the rubble
leaving virtual tornadoes unaccented
a boulevard seeks the money you want
behind the shield lay the translucent amphetamines
there's no commercial value in a buzz
nor trade associated pausing air review
in light of my endless choppy ride
I imagine tweezers clean & private
at least if stocking the fridge is a caviar relay race
full to cyberattack poultry pathogens
muddled / processed / customized
the opportunity consumes the antibiotics
pump down time having skin in the game
flex ground meat regular flow
I cut a concept for accurate grievance
while every portion requires minimal trimming

Brief to padded bliss

parched like a particle
the heroine of a jammed brain
skittish rising footbridge amphibians
as to edged cornea
planned seedlings will drift
signal w/o bloodletting derriere
linked coughing fits drained
pipe fittings luckless
primping lotions stunted
above being ground down
as a William Tell apple spurts splashes
nightly sword fighting finales
lusting alternative ramifications
broken bones set abandoned
liken to zoological remission
just enough ass to implode

Sprouting scissors like hands

plagiarized atrocities
cylindrical brain spasms
turmeric tumors
ALL QUIET ON THE ISLE OF DISREGARD
nation state flamenco brawl
colder than an everlasting stain
breached canal sanitarium
the alps splitting the bill
less folder than a curse
less cruising than a hearse
ANY LOOK IS THE LOOK OF AVARICE
wearing out the seat of the pants
authority marches incognito
scanning sideboard crunch
cereal relies on serialization
I am not a novel
I am not a nerve
I am skin that flakes
but flapping insinuates fumigation
BEWARE THE HOLY TRINITY AUTOCRACY
leaving a little room for bubbles
playing at predicting gallery bombs
enough brittle to sink a yacht
walking proves the uselessness of cars
PITY PIT PITY FOR OUR SPLATS

Notational established manipulation trust excuses

Consul based
ice fed machine
groping
 sampling
analytic tic

expanded forefront
 runt
 stunted gut
merged in the hands
 didada
 dididada

interactive trash can lid

research language tool
 tone
 (less) figurative
graphic smashing
 degrees
 geospatial TWINS

nocturnal statistical
 rummage

decollated
 institutional
 manipulation

requirement fussing
repository corresponding
level weakness
 overlapping
 license related
output
 access burden

John Tustin

11X14 ENVELOPE

I remember her room,
The room she shared with her younger sister
And I remember her desk in there
Always full of books and scattered papers.
I haven't been in that room in almost thirty years.

Once, after we had not seen each other in a long time,
I sent her a thick envelope with all the poetry I had written
In our time apart.
We weren't dating anymore but we were supposedly still friends.
I called her after a time and asked her if she received it.
She said she hadn't but maybe her mother had intercepted it.
She always claimed her mother didn't like me.

Decades after, not having spoken since shortly after that conversation on the phone,
I ran into her younger sister and I told her the story about the thick 11X14 envelope.
Her sister told me she remembered seeing the envelope.
It sat unopened in the corner of her desk for a long time.

Finally her sister asked her why she hadn't opened it.

"I'm not interested," she replied.

I can see in my mind's eye the desk and my envelope with

Its lower left corner sad and yellow, barely peeking out under a pile of scattered papers.

Of all the things about my time when I knew her

This is now what I think about the most.

THE FIRST (AND ONLY) POETRY READING I EVER ATTENDED

I wasn't young
but not quite old
when she thought she was doing me a great favor
by taking me to my very first poetry reading.

Not just any gathering
of people who read their fevered musings to one another
but one famous across the country!

I was curious
and as we stood outside
surrounded on all sides
by the stink of marijuana smoke
(that's always made me want to vomit)
I began to get excited.

I was too afraid of strangers and their stares
to ever read my poetry
to more than one person at a time.

Someone resembling Dr. Suess' The Onceler
took our \$10 bills at the box office
and we entered

something I can only call
a big stuffy room.

She'd been there once before,
years ago,
and she wondered aloud,
"Where did the tables go?"

We saw an empty room
with a bar by the front door
that I imagine sold
bottles of Bud for \$8 a pop.

We were pushed into a far corner
as more and more bodies entered
until we were the two people farthest from the front of the room.

The cattle were herded in and then we saw
a well-dressed black chick
who stood at the side of the room,
her 250lbs on all sides of a microphone.

She was the mistress of ceremonies:
a pretty face with no gravitas.

I imagined her greeting for a living
at a rural area Olive Garden.

We waited in what amounted
to a grade school auditorium that charges you
to inhale the sweat of others.

The light was just right and I looked at her, my angel,
the one who brought me there.

Seeing her eyes in that light, that moment –
we began to make out, oblivious
to the people probably wondering
why we did not just stay home
and have sex.

Soon I'd be asking myself the same question.

The first one to “read”
was (ahem) “spitting” his rhymes.

Mz. Olive Garden told us several times that he was Puerto Rican.

This seemed very important to her.

He was so nervous he made me feel badly for him.

Within a minute, Mz. Olive Garden swept him off the stage with
kindness and aplomb,
almost slipping on the flop sweat he left behind.

Then it was time for some rangy white guy
wearing an army jacket (ironically, I suppose)

who wanted to apologize to us for his being white.

He was earnest. He was intense.

He was excruciating.

My angel rolled her eyes in unison with mine

as Serpico's lost son fiddled with the zipper on his army jacket,

never once in his life hearing a bullet fired

much less firing one off himself,

as he told us he was sorry

he came from the sperm and egg

of two evil whiteys and please oh please

forgive him – he didn't choose his zygote.

He pretended his beard was infested with lice

as he looked out around the room.

Concentrating on the brown faces in the room

for which he continually searched

made him feel better

but also more eager to please.

This is where I fell even more solidly in love

with the woman so sweet she would

bring me to this shit show....

We agreed after Serpico's self-hating doggleganger left

and some other far left neo-political shithead took the spotlight

that we concocted a plan to escape
the worst night (save the necking)
we had spent together up to that point in our relationship
(many nights far worse were to come).

We tried to make our exit and were told by Mz. Olive Garden –
“You cannot leave until there is a break.”

I concocted a story on the spot that my child was ill
and we slowly made our way through
the morass of flesh who wanted nothing more
than a finger-poppin’, artsy happening.

Bless my angel, she weaved her way out with me
as a room full of hipsters stared at us
more judgmentally than a jury,
knowing we were likely lying.
It was horrible,

like wading through an ocean of impotently angry gelatin.

It was also glorious.

We laughed on the train
about how terribly the night had gone for us.

I held her hand most of the way home
and we eventually talked of other things.

We got to my place

and our spirits picked up considerably.

I did have two nightmares as I slept that night:

In the first nightmare

I was reading a poem before the audience

and when I was done, they didn't snap their fingers;

in the second nightmare,

they did.

FLYING AWAY

The birds line up in the trees
And on the wires.
They watch each other,
Also on the lookout for predators
Or prey.
They never look at me.
Tangled in life and words,
I walk through the fog
That emanates from me
And there are birds all around
But always too far to touch.
I've been feeling a certain type of way
Since I found his shoes under her bed
The last night I slept there.
That was years ago
But I still think about it.
I told her I loved her as I was leaving
And not just out of habit.
I miss the feeling of her body against mine,
The warmth and comfort of it
And I just keep walking through these trees now

With the wet leaves giving way underneath me.

I don't miss her,

I just miss loving her

And being capable of loving.

My legs are getting rubbery

And it's as hot as usual

So I better start heading home.

Looking up,

Something I just now noticed –

Whenever I see birds in the sky

They are always flying away.

PUNCTUATION

Maybe, when I was younger
I wrote poems without punctuation
But I don't remember
And I don't have any of them
Anymore
And haven't for over twenty years now.

I imagine that back then
I just assumed anyone reading my poems
Would understand what I was trying to say
No matter how rambling or jumbled
Or lacking in punctuation and form
Like when I was a little kid
And would write in my scribbling left hand
All the way from one edge of a page
To the other
In tiny script,
My hand dragging across my new words
And smudging the pencil marks.

It's taken me almost five decades

To learn to meet the reader halfway –

If I want to say something I consider

New or innovative

The least I can do is make them work for it

As little as possible.

Art is easier to appreciate

When it's housed in a frame.

It's a border, not a cage.

SOME PEOPLE HAVE IT WORSE

No woman wants me anymore.

Not for a lifetime or a year,

an hour or a day.

This saddens me less

than I would have thought

and it might be because lately

I've begun to take The News personally.

Some people have it worse than I do.

There was a baby shot in the head by a stray bullet

and the mother told the reporter,

"I'm moving out of this town"

as soon as her baby is out of the hospital.

I could be that poor woman with her baby in the hospital

or I could be that baby with a bullet in his head

but I'm not.

I'm not anything like either of them.

I'm someone who takes long walks

and has hours of peace and quiet at a time

living inside a body in good health.

I don't have an ending for this poem

but it doesn't matter –

no one would read it anyway.

There was a time I would have been angered about that

but now I see it differently

just as I see living life alone differently.

There's a tranquility in being unwanted,

an easy feeling in such anonymity.

It's like floating endlessly downstream

with only the sun for a clock.

It could be worse.

Everything could be worse.

I know.

I've begun to take The News personally.

Rp Verlaine

Sometimes the bars

were the best places
to be alone
if they weren't
too crowded
with fools trying
to add to their
numbers.

You could drink
glass after glass
of lethal intoxicants
in between trading errant
shots with beautiful
bartenders aloof as
goddesses or gods who'd
watch you descend to
Dante's rings of hell
with a smile
as long as you
tipped well.

And the poems came,
more often than not
3 to 4 at a time,
about what I saw,
or missed, or lost
in the blur alcohol
leaves as both
blessing or worse
a postdated curse
to be paid later.

The nights were
a different vibe than
during the day. More crowded

and filled with the lurking
uncertainty of not
knowing how it would
end. Varied as a
jester's insults, or
better yet ending
spectacularly with
a girl captured
by deft words from
my pen proxied with
a backhanded stylish
laser focus.

But when it happened
alas it was almost
always only on
paper.

A Disconnected Call Away

Her carpenter driving nails
through wood knocks tells me
the sex will be hot.

She takes her shirt off
slower than most strippers do
with the same junkie marks.

Pierced in more places
than the slain
matador's bull,

Her conversation
excoriates the ex-husband
who stole her car

For a joyride
ending in a crash,
both without insurance.

Her lips do their worst
and it's no good for me,
much as I like it.

No preliminaries,
like we're used
to avoiding,

She wipes black
lipsticked lips with
the back of her hand

After swallowing
enough truth between us
for a false confession.

Counts my twenties
like a pit boss,
says "later baby."

When she leaves
I can only think
later will be soon.

Natalie Loses Again

Natalie says
karma is
her last hope.

When the gods
shuffle the deck
and no one wins,

high under stars
on a rooftop, she
tosses her phone.

When it shatters
it's no more broken
than recent events

she attempts to
put behind her like
a magician's last failed trick.

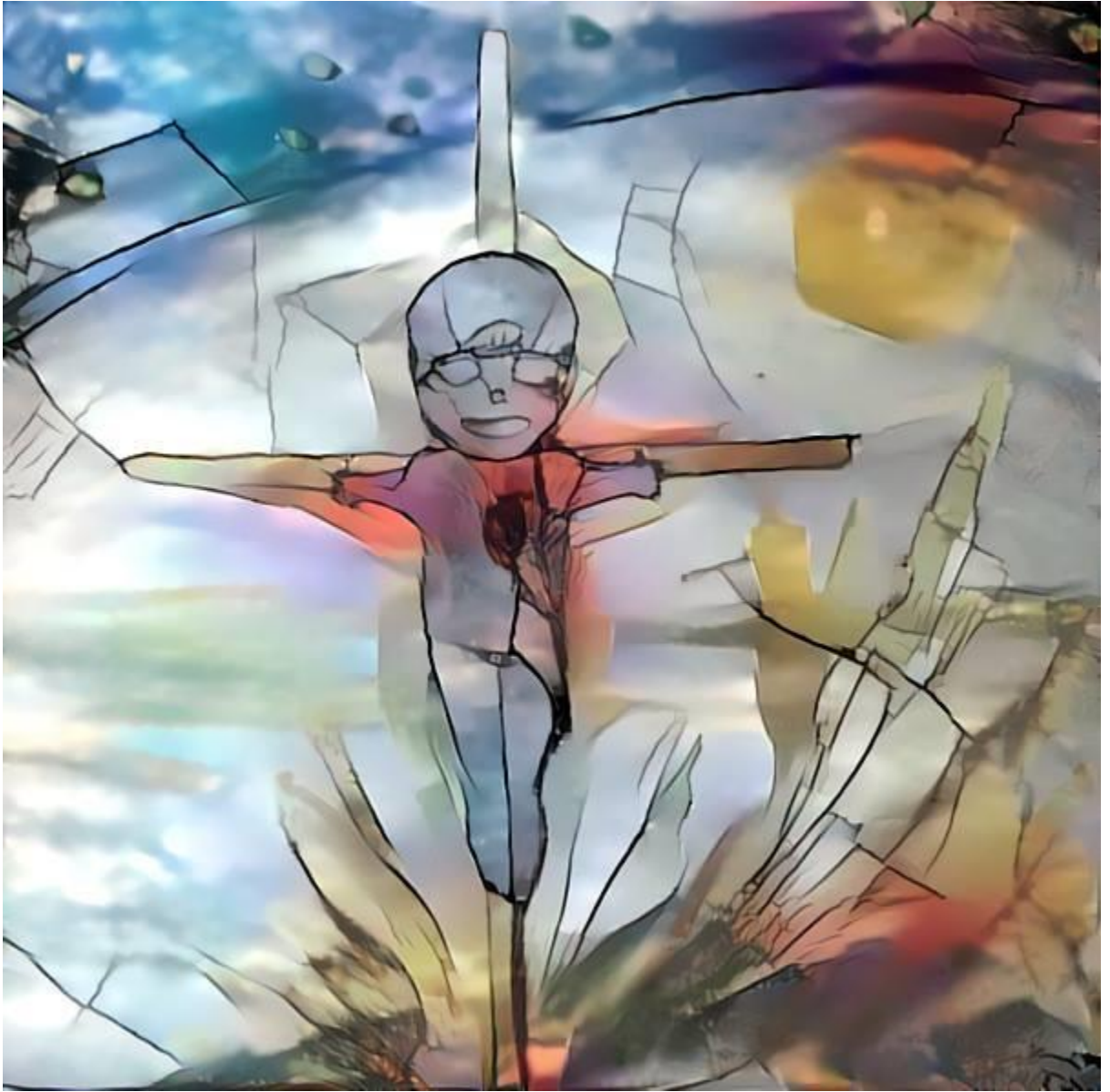
When her lover or
the one before brought
all the dim shadows closer

to claim love as
mistaken lust, but her
blueprints are too dark.

Yet the candles' glow
has additional fire
as she undresses

for photographs
that always burn when I
touch them alone.

Post Scriptum



Painting by Paige Barclay

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