

Lyric Appendage at the Dali Museum

By Woods Nash

I'm near the ocean, trying to make sense
of my friend's death. He was only thirty-six.
The funeral starts in an hour. I flew in to give
the eulogy, but I'm not ready. Not even close.
I roam through rooms of Dali's paintings,
find one called *Skull with Its Lyric Appendage
Leaning on a Night Table Which Should Have
the Exact Temperature of a Cardinal's Nest*.
That's really the title. I'm not here to lie.
My friend would've liked the somber terrain,
which looks rough and parched. Something small
hovers low in the foreground—tiny wings
and a dab of shadow. Like the gull I glimpsed
from my motel window, way out over gray water.
Then the TV came on. When I looked back,
the gull was gone. Three years have passed
since I last saw him. My friend, I mean.
He seemed fine—better than me, maybe. Wife, job,
second child. We drank and laughed in the dark
dungeon of a bar until he hopped on stage
and played bass with the band. He was good.
No one knew he was using, scratching each day
for a new vein. How could *casual*
and *casualty* have anything in common?
I worry about the bird—where it will go.
In the painting's desert is a grand piano,
but the lid is shut, and the white keys crumble,
morphing into teeth. I see a stucco home
in the distance, but its one wooden door
is tremendously closed. Do you have to be
religious to stand by a casket and ask everyone
to sing? I might just scream my sadness
in silence, which is how museums like it.
It's not too late to make the funeral,
but I can't bring myself
to budge from this spot. Like the time I stood
on a bridge in Michigan, high
above a blue river. Trucks whooshed by.
My friend had jumped, but I was stuck, petrified.

And now I wonder about the bird again—
where it will nest, and if it's nothing
more than a vanishing gesture
for my friend, and me, and every other
winged thing, desperate for direction.

Woods Nash is an escaped convict who teaches medical humanities at [redacted]. He looks nothing like the photo above. He certainly doesn't enjoy kayaking the rivers of [redacted], nor is he a former tour guide at Mammoth Cave National Park. His poems and essays might have appeared in *JAMA*, *Annals of Internal Medicine*, *Girls and Corpses Magazine*, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, *Emu Today & Tomorrow*, and *Academic Medicine*. But maybe not. He remains at large.

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