

THE ADDICTION BIRD

poem by Agnes Hanying Ong



Image: "Shadowland" by Arthur Lawrence. "The Addiction Bird" was written by Agnes Hanying Ong for *Rattle's* Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2023, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

In a dream
someone calling your name
from a far sea. A sign
from Allah. Says the book
of which, oriole, people.
*To Allah, I pray everyday
that you will find the way and live
a life without the drink.* It is
the only speaker of an
anguish, anguish of
idyllic geese. How do birds say good
bye to their chicks? When
the black birds came, they wore
colors of a rainbow and
the colors fell off on
everything. Live like a bird I keep
having this dream of
school shooting, no, it takes

place in a drugstore, where
the usual girl, who is there, says
*Look, look, that guy is
coming. Do you hear gunshots. What's
that? Flickering in the distance?
Wait, that's gunfire. Okay, so
what now? Are we supposed to
run out? He is outside. So
should we run in?* In this literal
drugstore rimmed with aisles
of bottles to be
walking, where you
might think this is holy
temple of genies, we are
running past: genies or, *jinn*
or *jaan*, sentenced
to life as numerous
drinks in bottles all full, same

place where I once witnessed a
bird die, having flown
into glass, less than a minute
ago. Here, we arrive at: an empty
room, which has a lock, on the
metal door. *So we ought to
be safe here. Just lock the door, lock
the door.* I lock the door, realizing
there is another room inside this room
which has no windows. The room is
walled with just cold, concrete
surprising in this town, like it is a miniature
medieval castle. It is like, nightly, we can
warm our hands here, stay low and close
to the ground, while setting a pile of
silverfish on fire and say: This is living. This is
peace, this is close, as close as,
as close as to
Allah any

one can ever be. Bullets of stale
-hard bread thrown upon window—
windowless, this is bird
on sugar water, this is twilight
dimmed in a flapping of wings, this is
bird scrambling for life, this is
malnourished—
Across swifts in the sky,
what kind of bird do you take us
for?