## THE ADDICTION BIRD

poem by Agnes Hanying Ong

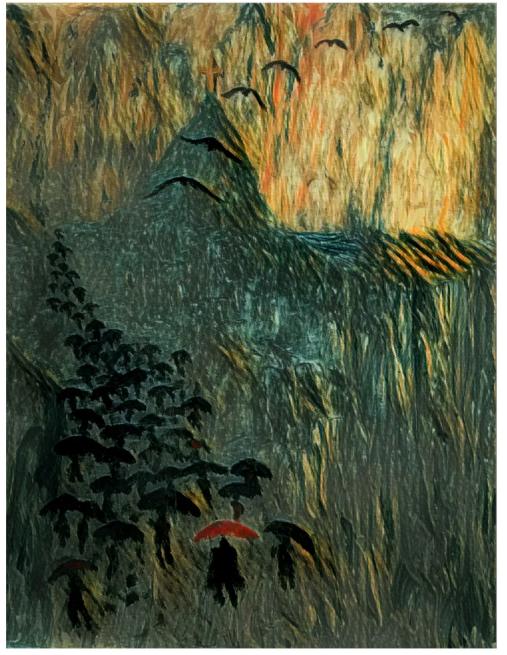


Image: "Shadowland" by Arthur Lawrence. "The Addiction Bird" was written by Agnes Hanying Ong for *Rattle*'s Ekphrastic Challenge, October 2023, and selected as the Artist's Choice.

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?

