

# FOR A ROBOT

poem by Alison Bailey

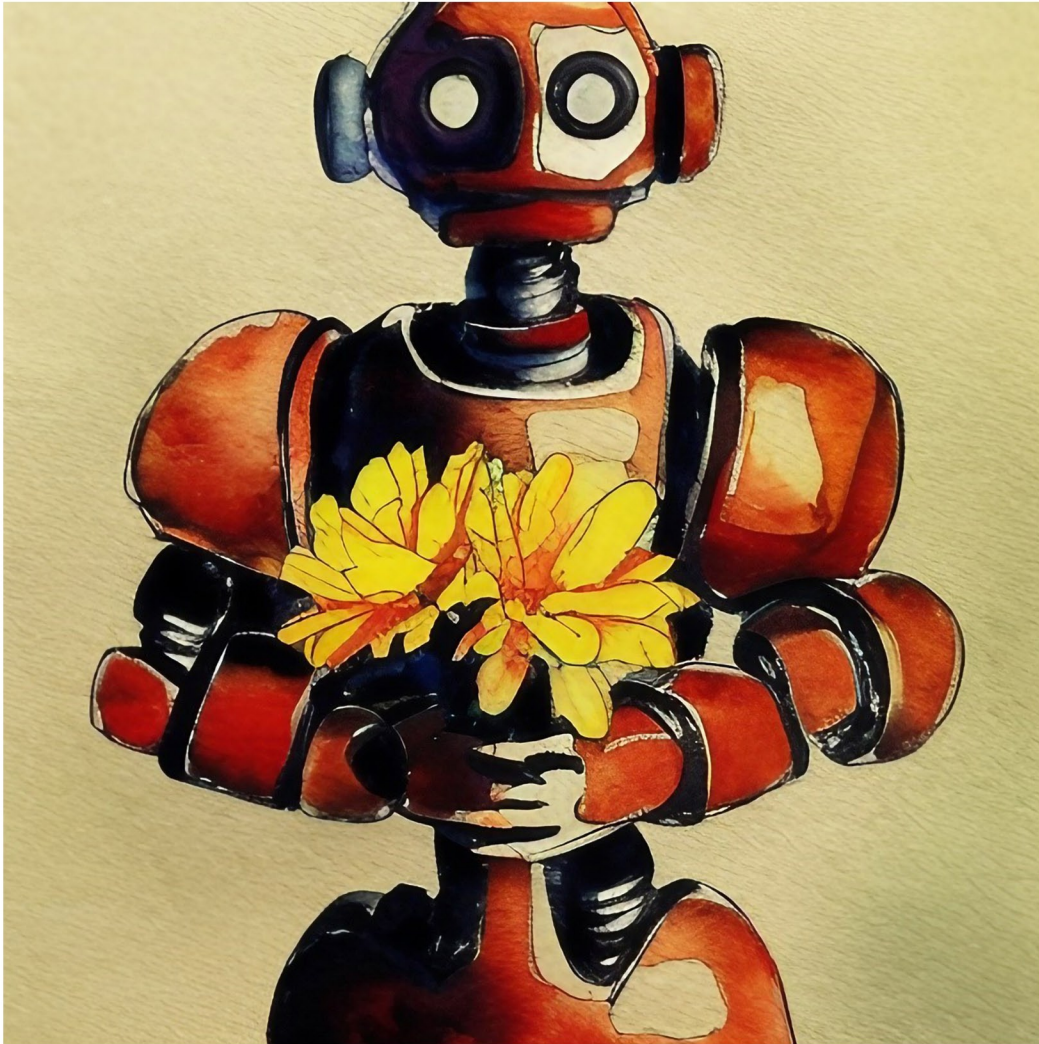


Image: “Yellow Flowers” by Carla Paton. “For a Robot” was written by Alison Bailey for *Rattle*’s Ekphrastic Challenge, September 2023, and selected as the Artist’s Choice.

to write a poem  
first  
it must survive a kindergarten schoolyard trauma, a sunburn on an overcast day,  
bury, in a small paper box that once held a bar of soap,  
the thumbnail-sized frog that was once a polliwog it caught at Mrs. Anderson’s  
pond whose tail fell off and hind legs emerged like quotation marks & had  
been kept in the rinsed Best Foods mayonnaise jar

must worry a tobacco-stained grandfather’s hand  
run over a jackrabbit on I-40 in the Arizona desert  
get divorced  
burn dinner  
confess its sins  
suffer food poisoning  
refuse to eat blue M & M’s  
hang, on a sweet-breezy July, laundry in Fishtail, Montana—eye the distant Sawtooth  
Mountains & hum “Waltzing Matilda” which it learned from Miss Vineyard  
in second grade

must fear thunder  
rush to focus its binoculars on the wintering Lazuli Bunting  
tell white lies to be kind  
shout “Heavens to Betsy!”  
be part of a standing ovation  
endure recurring nightmares  
question the crossing guard about the origin of “fingers crossed”  
develop calluses as it learns to play the twelve-string banjo  
have its hair smell of campfire smoke  
swat, during a humid-summer dusk, at mosquitoes on a dock full of splintered  
cypress wood at Half Moon Lake in Eau Claire, Wisconsin

forever dislike Brussels sprouts because it overcooked them and they smelled like  
rotten eggs  
must watch wind  
weep at a funeral  
lose anything  
imagine infinity  
doubt God’s existence  
die a little every day  
then, perhaps—