

Wilderness House Literary Review 12/4

Jane Costain

"HALF-PAST THREE (THE POET)"

after the painting, Marc Chagall

It is magical, this time, early
in the morning. The room revolves
in a kaleidoscope of colors----

red, blue, green, white. My friend
paints feverishly to capture all
on canvas. And I, with a cup

of coffee in one hand, hold a pen
in the other, as phrases in the Cyrillic
spill from a page of my notebook.

Inspiration pours freely as wine
from the bottle floating nearby.
The green cat licks my sleeve

turning my upside-down head
the same color that she is.
In this moment, I brim

with brilliance and a prism of words
spins within me. It is all I can do
to write them down fast enough.

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THE YELLOW DRESS

after the painting, Henri Matisse

Day after day, she sits
in front of the open window,
shutters partway lowered
to shield her from the hot
Mediterranean sun.

Under the wide-brimmed hat
her hair is still dark
after all these years, her figure
girlish, spine upright
within the slim bodice.

No sigh visible
in her prim rigidity.
Yet bare arms hint
an incandescent yearning,
a yearning hidden in
the folds of the long skirt.

Evenings, under cover of darkness,
she crosses the now cool tiles
and removes her hat,
the confining dress
to lie in quiet solitude
until morning, when once again
she must ready herself
to make public her waiting.

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DECEMBER MORNING

These are the cloudy, snow-filed
days of childhood---the house,
always cold at the edges,
the dark frame of night, so wide

dawn merges with dusk.

The day waits, prepared for me
like a grapefruit on a plate, halved,
its flesh loosened, ready to eat.

Outside the window, small birds
feast at an overflowing feeder.
Yesterday, blue jays splashed
their color about the white,

black-etched landscape.

One morning, I saw a cardinal
bloom like a rare rose
on a snow-covered branch.

Today, I hunger for the world
and all its beauty, and for
something...something beyond
this world of sleeping and waking.