
POETRY | SPRING 2021

Rorschach

By Irene Sherlock

Above my desk, a flock of yellow birds look out from a white canvas.
They stare: inky eyes, orange beaks, streaks of feathered green.

Yellow birds, some close, some distant on a branch from an unseen tree.
Clients want to know what it means.

“I like it,” they’ll say, as if appreciating art means they’re not too far gone.
No one wants to be too far gone.

When I’m making their next appointment they’ll search my bookcase,
scan titles about couples therapy, eating disorders, addiction.

One man stood and inspected my license.
A regular turns on the fan each week, complaining about the heat.

Almost everyone helps themselves to the candy jar. Tootsie rolls.
Snickers. They tell me about their next court date or their crazy ex

who called the cops and how dare that son of a bitch say I started it.
They sit across from me and tell me things

and sometimes ask about the birds in the painting.
I have no real answer,

other than to say it’s a gift from my niece, an artist.
The man yesterday fingered his appointment card,

cocked his head, seeming uneasy with this explanation,
or maybe he was thinking about the rain pelting the window,

how he didn’t have an umbrella
and it was a long walk down the hill to the bus stop.

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