

MARY SZYBIST

ENTRANCES & EXITS

At 5:09 Olivia, who is 6, walks into my office looking for snacks. She opens the bottom file drawer to take out a bag of rice cakes and a blue 12 ounce carton of rice milk that comes with its own straw. I have been looking at a book of paintings by Duccio. Olivia eats. Bits of puffed rice fall to the carpet.

A few hours ago, the 76-year-old-woman, missing for two weeks in the wilderness, was found alive at the bottom of a canyon. The men who found her credit ravens. They noticed ravens circling—

Duccio's *Annunciation* sits open on my desk. The slender angel (dark, green-tipped wings folded behind him) reaches his right hand towards the girl; a vase of lilies sits behind them. But the white dots above the vase don't look like lilies. They look like the bits of puffed rice scattered under my desk. They look like the small white fleck at the top of the painting that means both spirit and bird.

Olivia picks up the wooden kaleidoscope from my desk and, holding it to her eye, turns it to watch the patterns honeycomb, the colors tumble and change—

Today is the 6th of September. In six days, Russia will hold a day of conception: couples will be given time off from work to procreate, and those who give birth on Russia's national day will receive money, cars, refrigerators, and other prizes.

Sou'wester

A six hour drive from where I sit, deep in the Wallowa Mountains, the woman spent at least six days drifting in and out of consciousness, listening to the swellings of wind, the howls of coyotes, the shaggy-throated ravens—

I turn on the radio. Because he died this morning, Pavarotti's luminous, unnatural Cs ring out. Singing these notes, he said he was seized by an animal sensation so intense he would almost lose consciousness.

Duccio's subject is God's entrance into time: time meaning history, meaning a body.

No one knows how the woman survived in her light clothes, what she ate and drank, or what she thought when she looked up into the unkindness of ravens, their loops, their green and purple iridescence flashing—

I think of honeybees. For months, whole colonies have been disappearing from their hives. Where are the bodies? Some blame droughts. Too few flowers, they say: too little nectar.

Consider the ravens. They neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. (Luke 12:24)

The men never saw the ravens—just heard their deep *kaw, kaw* circling.

Olivia & I look down on Duccio's scene. I point to the angel's closed lips; she points to his dark wings.

The blue container of rice milk fits loosely into Olivia's hand the same way the book fits into the hand of Duccio's Mary. She punches a hole in the top and, until it is empty, Olivia drinks.