

DAVID CAVANAGH

Distracted

Who knows why? Bamboozled by glare, shadows,
 reflections (maybe even their own,
 Narcissus lost in love), or crazy with spring
 (Icarus winging free toward the sun),
 or radar scrambled by too many cues, the waxwings
 swoop full tilt into the bay window
 of the children's library. Every spring like 9/11 jets
 they thud against the safety glass
 and break the heart of the kids' librarian. After
 the first few she can't take it, calls
 vets and agencies, even 911, not noticing the number
 is the same for rescue and for terror.

(Those damned dead Greeks. Why bring them into
 it? Why not?) Yesterday at the mall
 a doorway I strode toward, only half regarding,
 tuned out to be a window.
 Unlike the Red Sea that parted so graciously
 for Moses, this see-through wall
 bounced me like a tiresome drunk at the door
 of a downtown bar. Not even
 the drama of shattering glass, just a miniature
 red sea opening above a startled eye.

The eye, of course, the problem. Distracted by
 the splendidly worn jeans of the sales
 woman bending over the display to my right,
 I had thought myself in a miracle
 so fine that all must open before it. Plate glass,
 however, so good at transparency,

gives nothing away. Except suddenly I had her
 undivided. Nothing like blood
 on the loose to encourage a little focus.

Dripping bright red “sold” stickers onto her
 hardwood floor, I politely
 asked for a towel. She ran to call her boss
 instead. Not my best come-on,
 it seemed, though I had hoped the flow would
 lend a certain Pollock-like intensity.
 Truly I should know better at my age, etc., than
 to ogle, except knowing has little
 to do with it—usually it’s done before the brain
 has any say. Most likely genes led the way,
 same as the poor waxwings. Genes or delusion,
 some cock-eyed vision the world
 could not accommodate. Or wouldn’t. Like Icarus
 or self-loverboy, none of us much
 choice but to play the play and wing headlong.

Blood, as so often, the result. My mishap silly,
 theirs catastrophic; 20 or more,
 one by one they drove their black-masked
 heads into the invisible
 plane. Innocence no protection. Innocence
 the problem. Why rankles—
 unseen ache behind a cross-stitched brow.
 No telling, really. None.