Of Unknown Origin

Ali M. Tahvildari

The beads of sweat collect
at the notch below your sallow neck
your jaundiced skin
salted, where nothing can thrive
your feeble body probed again
and again
to understand perhaps for our sake
more than yours
what we can only call
a fever of unknown origin.

I stand across from you uneasily
leaning against
the cracked crimson paint
of the windowsill
each hiding behind our shields:
your thin parchment gown
and my flimsy white coat
starched for some semblance of control
over this fear of unknown origin.

Afraid that you’ll see
my confidence lacking,
that you’ll see me
as a confidence man,  
dismayed that with all our advances  
we can remain so uncertain.  
I brush the coarse strands  
of your auburn wig  
from your shuttered eyes—  
a favor of unknown origin.

There lie the roses  
that you will never smell  
the apple that you will never taste  
and there in the corner  
float the red balloons  
that you might have liked  
to release to the sky  
in a fervor of unknown origin.

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