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The Last Page

Albert Goldbarth

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Chagall / Linda Pastan

It is snowing
fiddle notes
on the village of Vitebsk
where brides float up
like the wicks
of sabbath candles.
In the kitchens
the dough cries out
to be braided,
or is it the hair
of the youngest daughter
newly washed
in ochre?

The Last Page / Albert Goldbarth

Sometimes, often, the tragic surface
lies. When I was ten, I gave my mother a Hardy Boys
mystery, she told me Who Did It
after one chapter, I was—just like the dumbshit chief
of police on every last page—thunderstruck. The
man without eyelids was innocent, appearance
having misdirected: the blood-soaked rope in his coatpocket

only a leash he walked his wounds with, the six gray
bullets in the revolver-barrel: only his abacus
for tallying joys, etc. Did I learn? Do I want to
still proffer handkerchiefs numinously as fire
department nets below whole megalopolises
of sobbing, sponge up each moan? Do
I. But here comes the man without

eyelids, has to weep to keep moist—his tear:
his sustenance. For some chiefs, it's never one chapter

simple, the butler dripping guilt, the parents
grief, all over the rug. Too complex: a crime
like spermicide: bereaved, bereaver, bereavee
all me. I just want to lie here, be the nutritive
bath around a heart.

FICTION / LEON ROOKE

The Magician in Love

The Magician knocks on our door. What am I? he asks. He stands rigid in the doorway, behind him a swirl of winter snow. There is six feet of it tonight—more on the way—how does he get around?

“What am I?”

He waves palm fronds, wears his top hat, has fresh fruit—orange and banana, grapefruit and peach—strung around his waist.

“Quickly now!”

We are not quick enough, and he goes. Again there is a knock on our door. Again he stands rigid in the doorway, in snow higher than his knees. The wind knocks over all our lamps. We sit in darkness for a time. The General has his aide light up the candles. The Magician stands just as he was. The snow all but covers him.

“What am I?”

“A fruit tree,” Countess Belonco replies.

“An Actor,” suggests the Mayor.

“You are both correct,” replies the Magician. “I am an actor playing the role of fruit tree.” Branches sprout from his body. The ripe fruit falls. “May I come in?”

Thus does the Magician practice what he knows. The fruit is different, but the trick, to my mind is old.

He enters, takes a seat far from the fire. He is uncomfortable, moves closer. He does not like that seat either, he exchanges chairs with the General. He crosses his legs, removes his hat. “A pleasant evening,” he says, “to you all.”

Countess Belonco nods; he nods back at her.

Madame Pelletier nods; he returns her gesture.

The Mayor nods. The General nods. So does the General’s aide. Count