

Herbert Draper,
'The Lament for
Icarus' (1898).



Daedalus Waiting

Fija Callaghan

He spends his mornings wandering
through charity shops
and antique markets
with tables that extend for miles.
Gathers watches, old clocks,
doors with elaborate locks and hinges,
kitchen appliances, children's toys:
anything with moving parts.

Even after all these years
he can feel the hum in his hands. Each cog
and interconnected link
a world of potential.

In his workshop, he undresses
each device, strips them into
disassembled parts. Many are flotsam,
developed too late or too hurriedly.
Plastic, he has learned,
does not carry life as well
as metal, wood, or wax.

Some bits he discards. Others
he carefully sorts and fits
layer upon layer atop a metal frame,
the kind they use in tailoring shops.
A face takes shape: chest, arms,
hands of typewriter keys.
There is no spark within these eyes,
not yet. One piece still is missing.

A music box, perhaps,
the golden gullet of a gramophone.
A heavy organ pipe
unearthed in an estate sale.
Something resonant
to give his marvel voice,
so he might wake and say
Father, did you see how high I flew?
There is so much world to see.
Where shall we go next?

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Fija Callaghan

Alice Alinari, 'Underwater Tenderness' (2019, Unsplash).



Womanskin

Fija Callaghan

In the first enclosure
are girls who like the damp.
Some of them wear sealskin;
some are dressed in scales that glow
in iridescent colours.

Most of them are not unused
to the roving hands of sailors.
Before, they could escape by diving
deeper than a net could reach,
but here there are only walls
and gentle whispers by the hour.

In this room adjoining
are women who once felt
the untamed thrill of storm clouds,
the soft caress of raindrops,
who knew each current of the wind
like the pulse of their own breath.

This one wears swanskin
stitched without seam nor needlework,
stitched out of nettle thread
and aching days of silence.

Here there are those beastly brides
whose coats are dappled like October,
who close their eyes in quiet hours
and breathe the scent of dirt and moss
and blood, remember running
in reckless abandon
for the sheer joy of living.

These ones should have known better,
should have been more careful,
should have recognised the scent of man.

Most of them are not unkind,
these well-dressed men
with unconventional desires.
Some whisper words of comfort,
words of solace
words of love
as they explore these unfamiliar shapes
that are woman and not-woman,
that are dreams given form and flesh.
On occasion, promises are made;
but the women have long learned
that such fragile things
cannot withstand the morning light.

After all the men have gone,
the balance paid, the lights turned low,
they lie together side by side
and keep each other warm.

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Fija Callaghan