

The Absent Presence

For many nights she had felt an unbearable anxiety. Though she had been taught the city was a dangerous place to be alone, she preferred to live in introspective isolation. Through long periods of tranquil traffic sounds she had wrestled a tenuous peace, but the last few nights she had felt a dread as if there were a presence just beyond her vision. A shadow, a rustle of the drapes, a premonition that there was someone or something in her apartment. Impulsively, she departed with no destination determined, attempting to purge the shadow of forbidding that had grown in her mind's eye.





The night was calm but provided no comfort. The feeling of dread did not abate. The presence was always intruding on the periphery of her consciousness. A compulsion to seek the company of others guided her further down the street. The streetlights cast dim pools of illumination, beyond which ominous shadows obscured her path. A dismal moon hung suspended from the branches. Sometimes these moons deceived her eyes and gave her signs that were unclear.



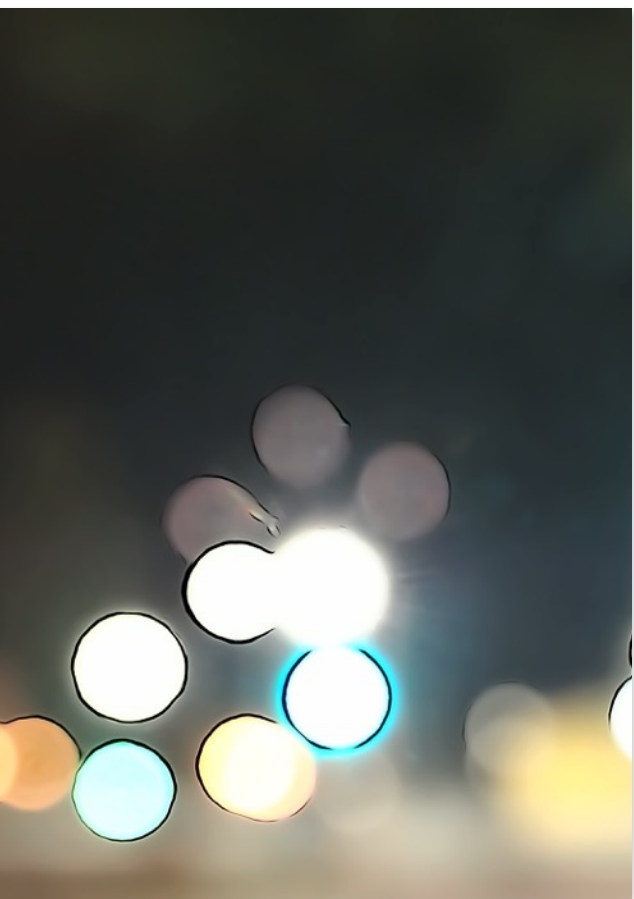
But sometimes, the signs were all too clear...





*She sought the anonymity of a crowd;
the security of a neighbor.*

But the streets were deserted and the locked doors did nothing to alleviate her isolation. Her thoughts turned to downtown.





Tween scholar's haunt
and drunkard's jaunt
a particular place is found.
It rises odd
this neighbor-hod
though nothing like it surrounds

Street lights vanish
and darkness panics
each walker on this path
Invisible dogs
pepper invisible bogs
with barks and blind wrath

Dark windows and dark porches
dot the cold still street.

Motion sensors turn on bleary lights
When invisible strangers they meet.



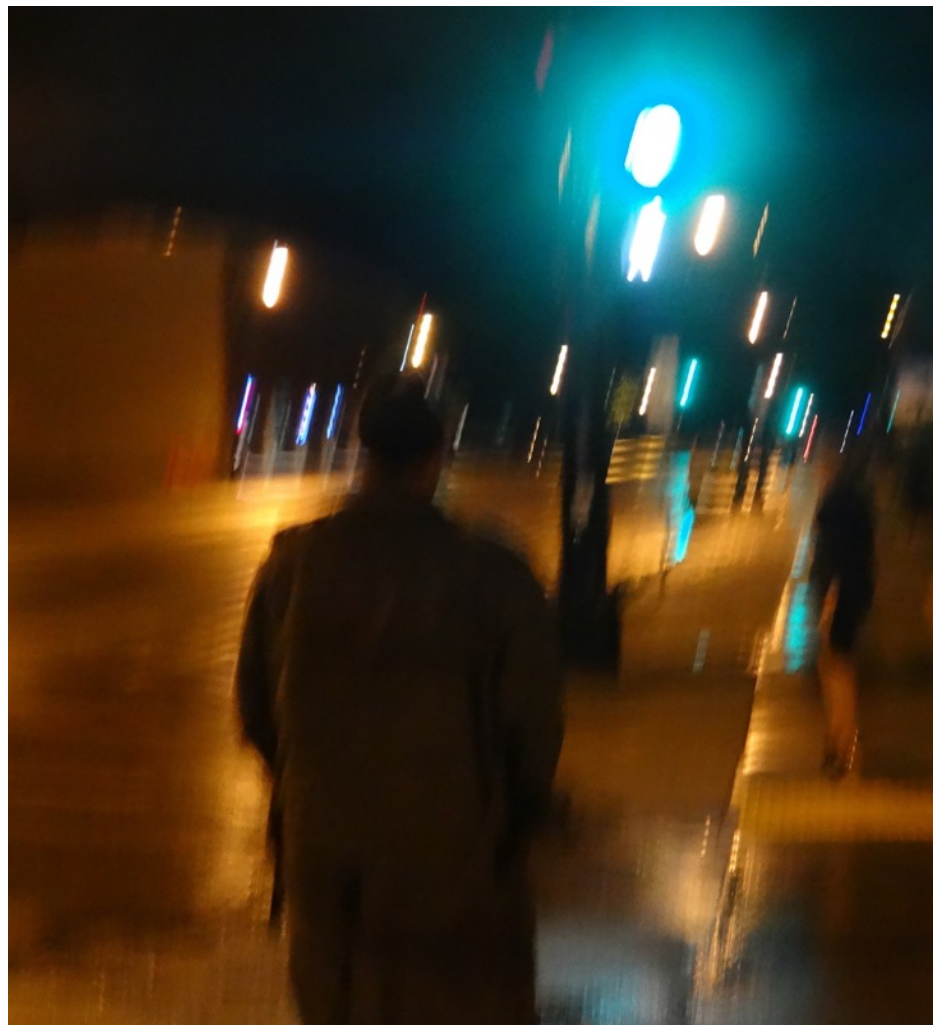


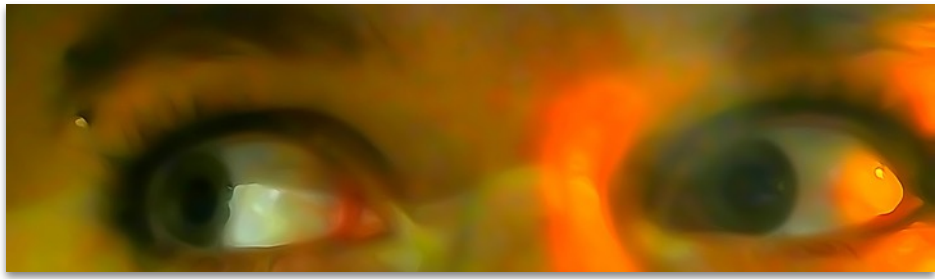
From out of the gloom
Rises a blue bloom
That comforts each passerby
The first sign of urban life
It vanquishes domestic strife
As walker from suburbia flies

This feeling that overwhelms
Derived from forgotten realms
Cannot aptly be described
For one remains unsure
Why suburbia they abjure
Until within its sight they find life

Rising like fireworks on horizon
The hospital denies one
The hopelessness that threatens
A life disconnected
Injury here is corrected
And the aura of a savior beckons

Blue flame that vanquishes darkness
To it she who is in fear harkens





The feeling of The Presence followed her.



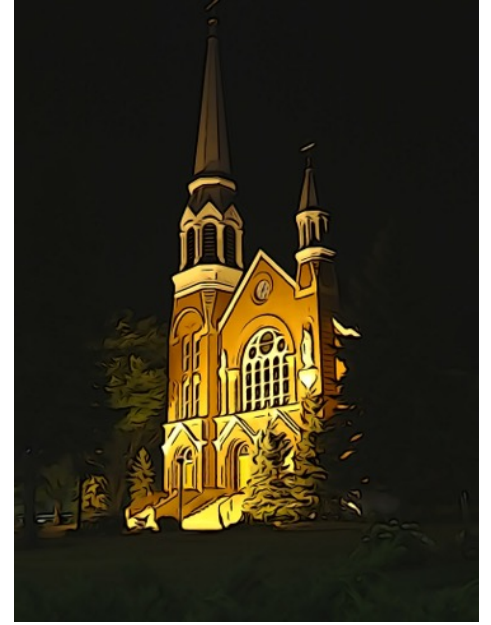
She turned and found only black windows in empty houses gaping back at her.



Silent blue angel passes
 The masses
 Welcomed in
 to church
 for new birth
 the poor welcomed in
 but how
 can we now
 enter in



where christ has been
 to save
 crave us to come within
 purge our sin
 but denial
 of entrance
 convince us
 we can't enter in
 relieve our sin



till tomorrow
 we borrow
 the blanket of night
 can't come in
 we been cold,
 old, blearily soldiering on
 we pass by and sigh
 cause we know
 we can't come in



So much for the
 mother's mercy...



Train tracks...
where do they lead
I can plead
to know
but they won't show
mysteries
they seed
in my mind
indeed, they go on
til dawn
across plains
and mountains
fountains of
steel mysteries
If I walk
will I find
what I seek
or be weak
and fall down



I hear the sound of trains
coming for me
to see if I can be

the one that they seek
track down mysteries
of seas they can't cross

emboss on my mind
see if I can find
the will to go on

knowing I'll never know
the mystery right here
before me.

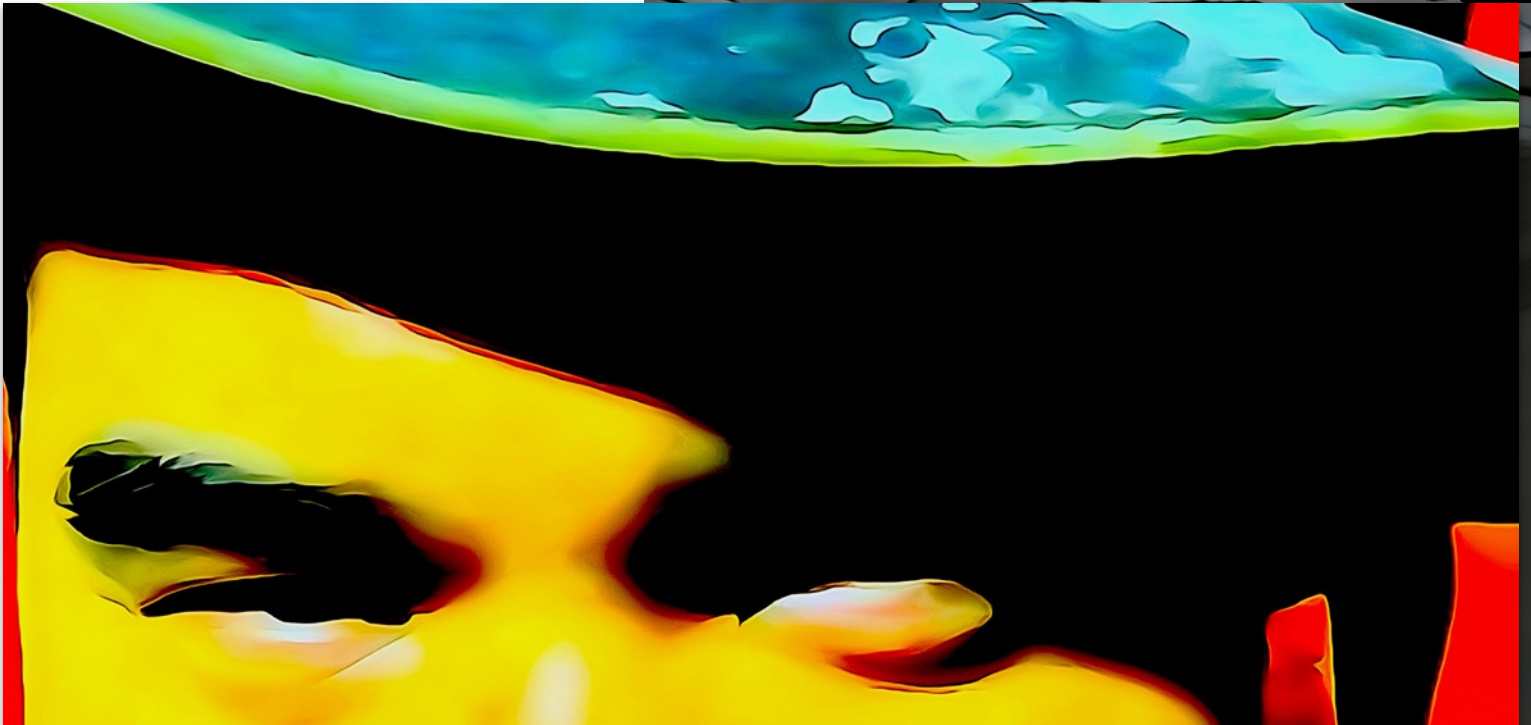
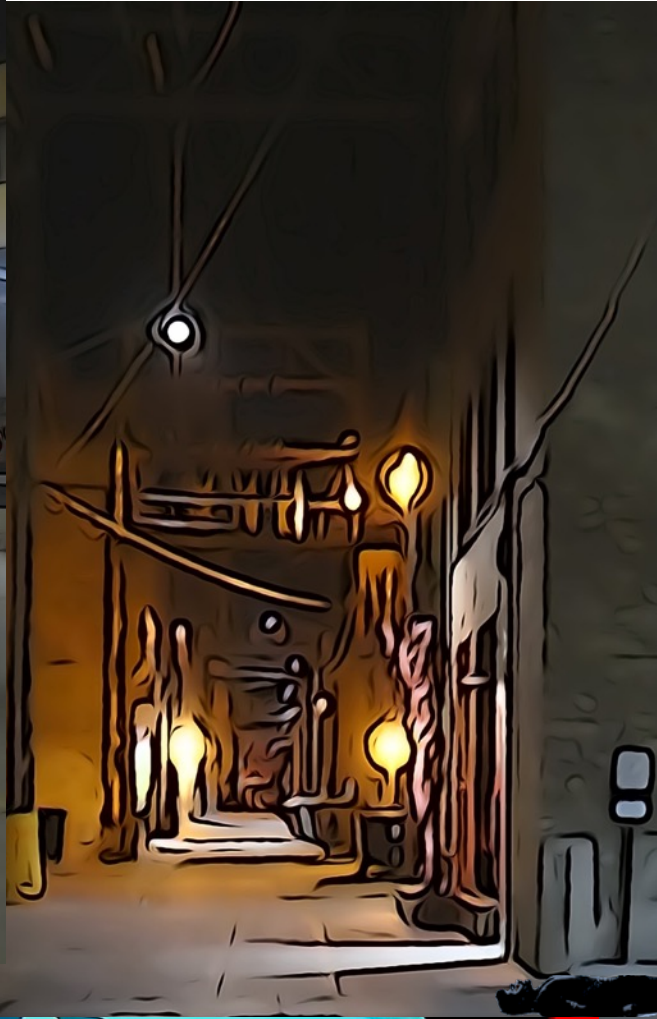


Stranger behind, mystery ahead
I cannot but turn instead
downtown will I fly
Never knowing the reason why

except that I must press ever onward
charge into deep dark destiny
ahead and behind dank
but the flood of my soul is cresting

so forward unto dawn
ere maw of night begin to yawn.

The theatre's sign was dark. The promise of safety had expired with the late hour. The Presence had returned, a creeping fear just beyond her sight. The dank alley beckoned, an avenue of escape.





A pool of white light illuminates the welcoming entrance of the Mezzaluna. Alas, the chefs had all gone home.



The door to Dempsey's Irish pub open and inviting, but the harshness of the crowd might be more dangerous than the presence of the unknown. Why fly to that which we know to threaten?

A solitary bicycle, absent its owner provides no locomotion. Is it still a bicycle if it does not cycle or is it now a dead construct like the brick that surrounds it that was once clay, alive with the presence of bacteria and vegetation?



The red door to The Boiler Room stands closed, lights out, and of drink slinger to hear her woes.



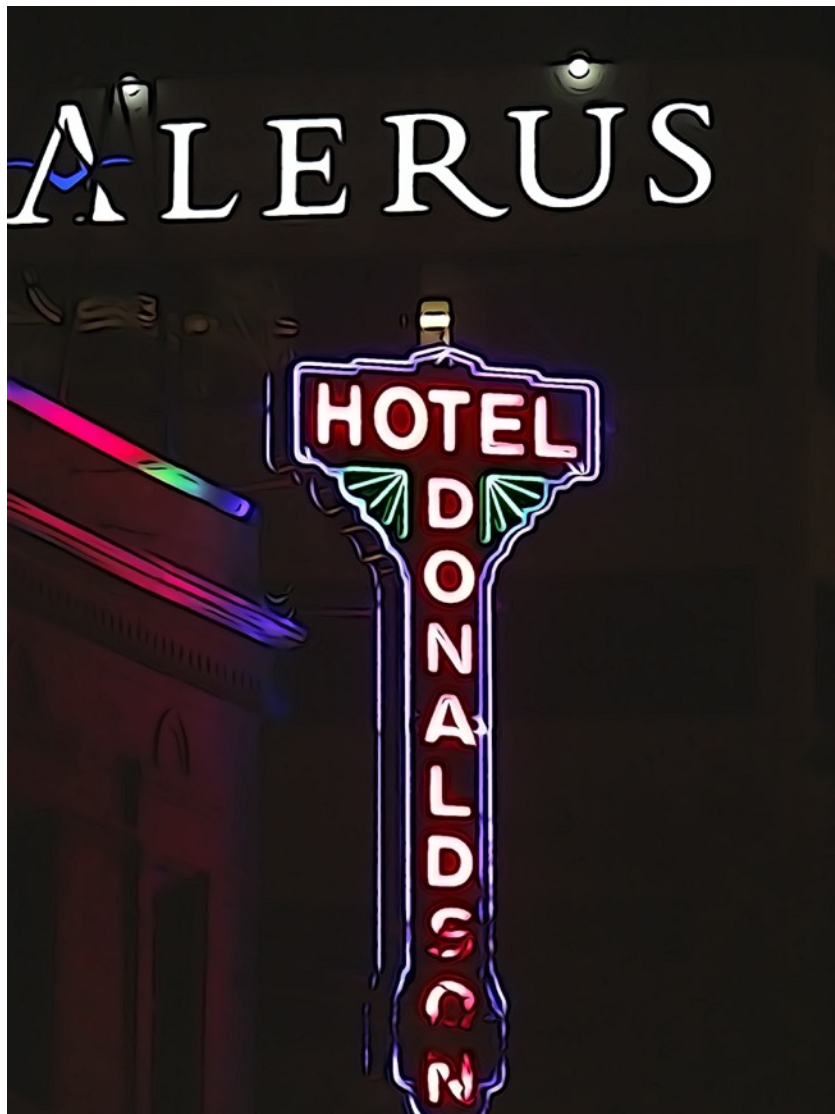




Finding no solace in the solitude of the alleyway, she pressed onward.



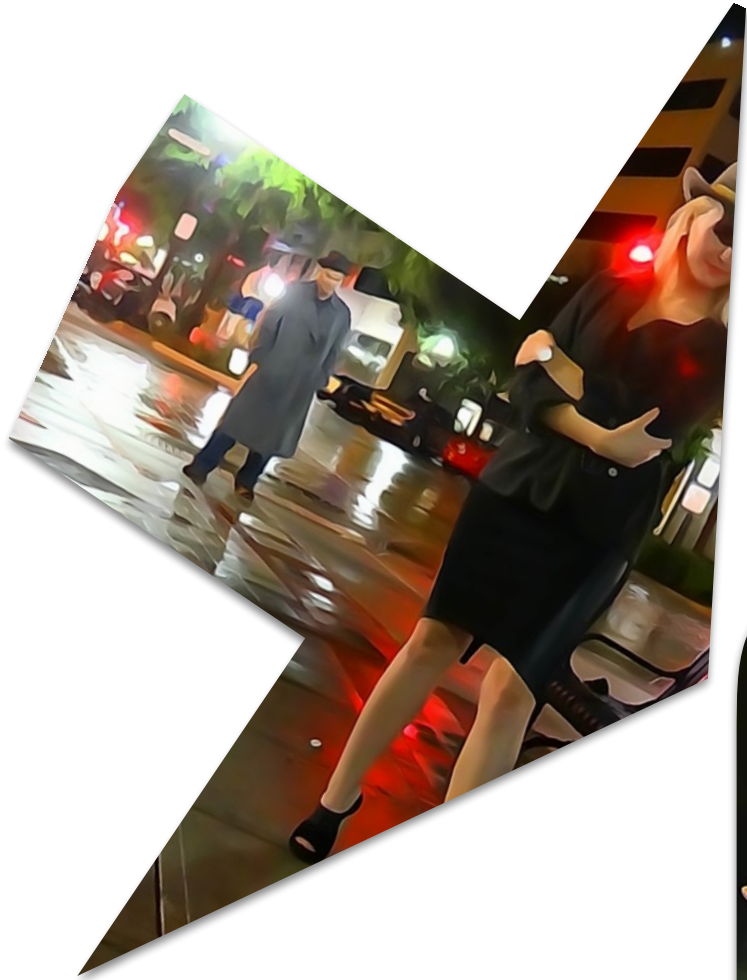
The buzzing light of the neon signs made her feel safer and seemed to annihilate the shadowed follower, whom she could no longer sense as she proceeded.

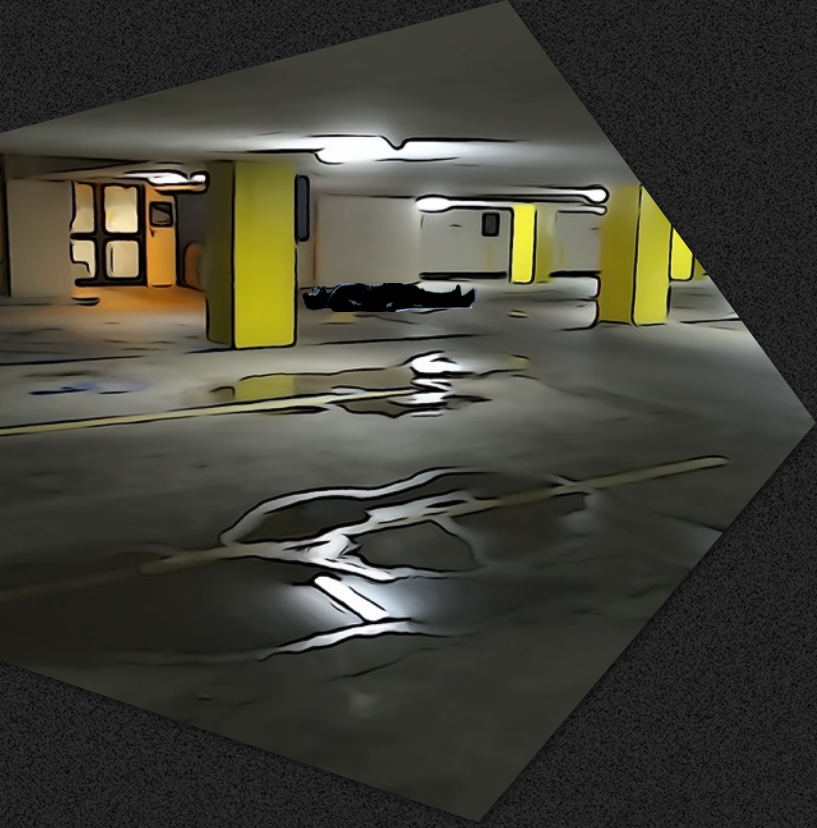




But sometimes even the main intersections of the city seem empty and forbidding.







What park is parked when near park none are parked? The emptiness of parking ramp leaves only ramp park nearby nonetheless none parked. Is a parking lot just a lot when none are parked inside? Is a park still a park when none dare park there?

What is plain in empty park is that emptiness is abundant, but is abundance of emptiness in fact presence of

nothingness or is it absence of presence? Does the absence of presence annihilate meaning or transform it?

Does the presence of absence create something new? Is a parking ramp near a park a new ramp when none are parked? Is it a new parking ramp when parking resumes? This park, where none park, near a ramp where none are parked but sometimes do, shall hide me while I park and solace to me provide.

as she enters the park...



But she isn't alone...

The old man sits with the angel of hope he knows that hope will never bring back that which he lost but he knows not what to do.

For his angel flew away long ago and he knows that hope cannot bring her back. Still he comes here each year on the vigil. He sits and waits to hear her giggle. The giggle of his long lost angel, the one for whom he pines and hopes.

Cruel fate one day, took her away, and obscured for him his path. That light extinguished, his faith all gone, the food of his soul's repast.

Shortly thereafter, this angel erected, he always felt her soul was protected by this new addition to the park. So he resolved to sit and commune with it, each year on the vigil of her birth.



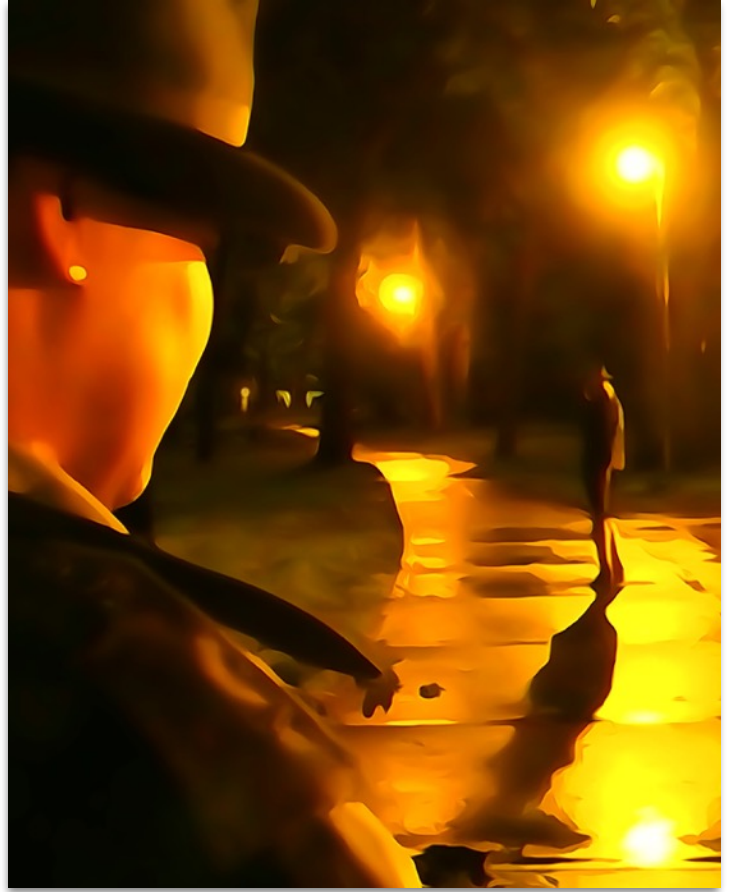


I've always depended on
the kindness of strangers
or so the old Williams line
goes. But when strangers
mean danger and all trust
is lost, where can
wanderer find repose?
In a dark city, whose
emptiness abounds,
chance meetings seem
destined from above.

How then can we not,
shed kindness where we
ought, as denizens of the
same great globe? An old
man or a new, might be
important to you, when
slings and arrows accost.
So stroll on and be kind,
and I think you'll find,
your kindness toward
strangers is not lost.



Wandering
the lonely park
a simple pleasure to be sure
You almost forget the dangers present
when in such a wondrous natural space
I cannot though forget what drove
me here this fateful night
solace do I seek
what now do I
perceive?
gazebo?
onward
through
park
let
us
see
what
wonders lie in store.





Perhaps the pool of light from the gazebo will banish the shadows?



To be, or not to be--that is the question:
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles
And by opposing end them.

To die, to sleep--
No more--and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to. 'Tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished.

To die, to sleep--
To sleep--perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub,
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause. There's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.

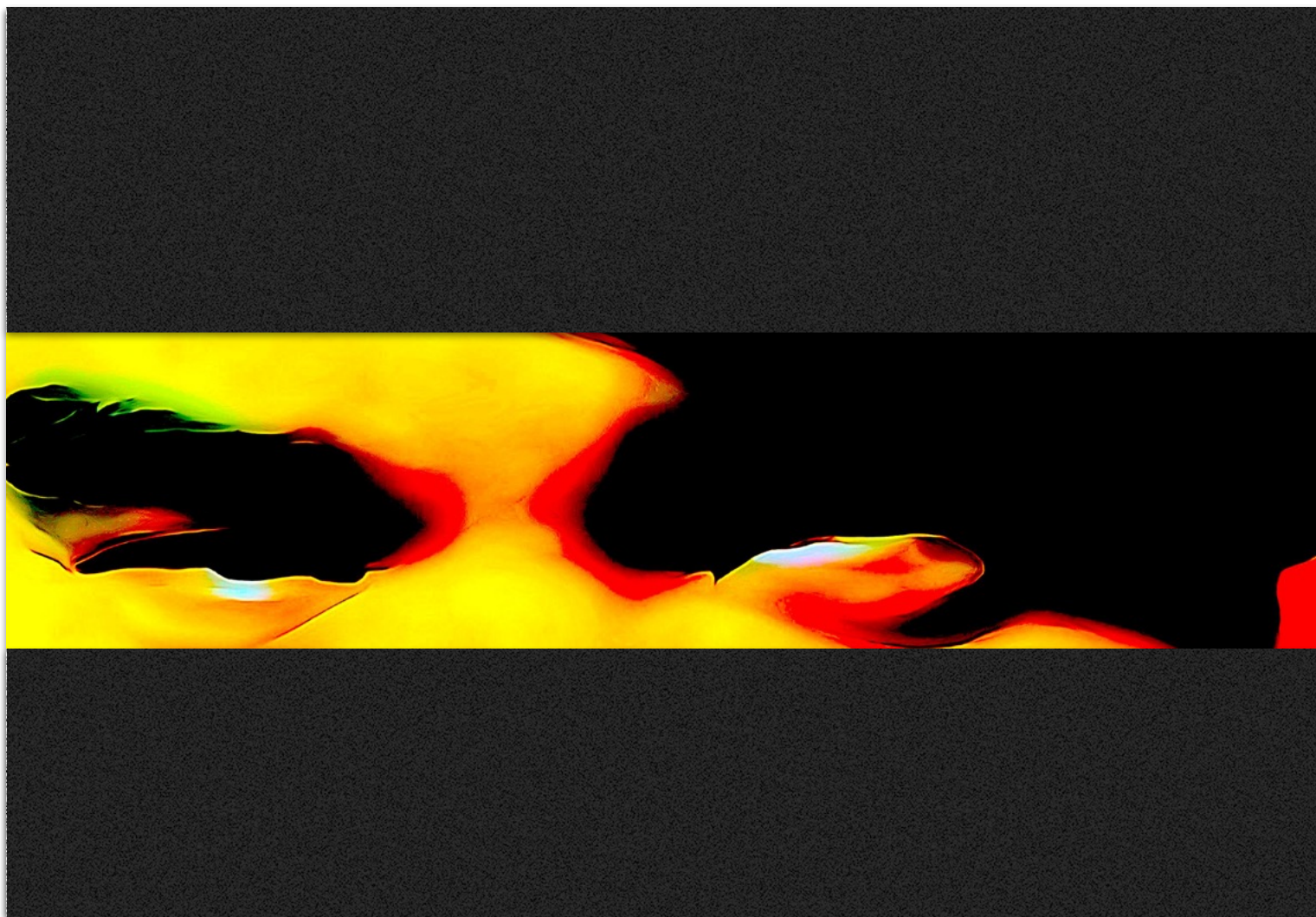
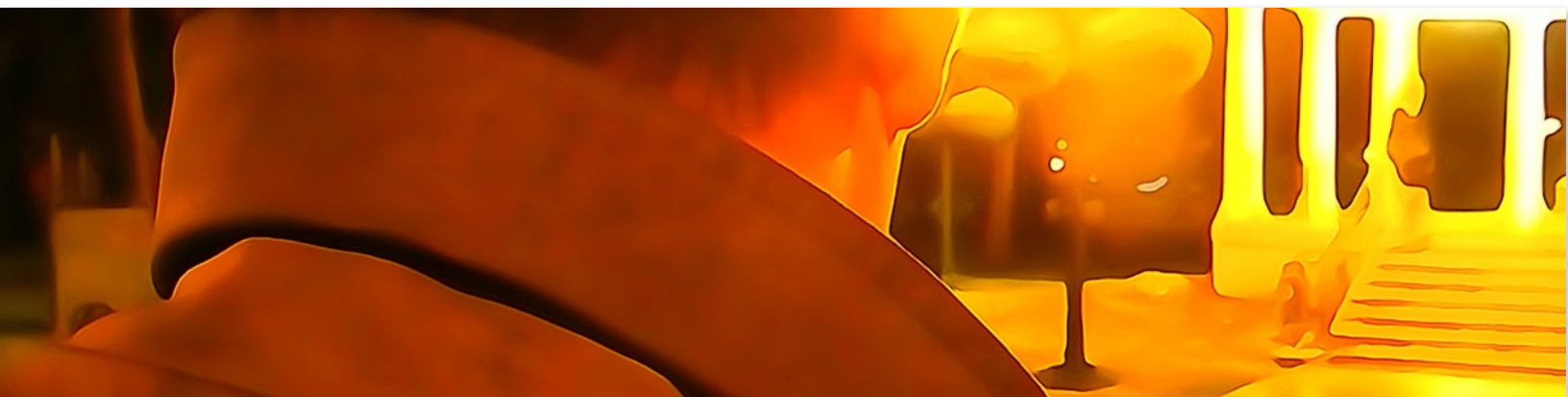
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
Th' oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurns
That patient merit of th' unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? Who would fardels bear,
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,

But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country, from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprise of great pitch and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry
And lose the name of action.

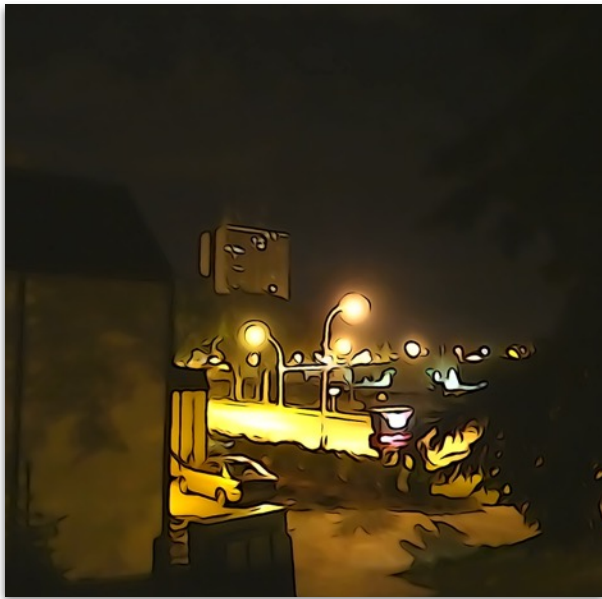








The Presence again was at her heels, its relentless pursuit drove her once again to fly. The security of this oasis of light was not sufficient to vanquish this darkness from her sight. In flight she found the anxiety that the Angel of Hope had driven away, returned with a vengeance that vanquished her feelings of warmth.



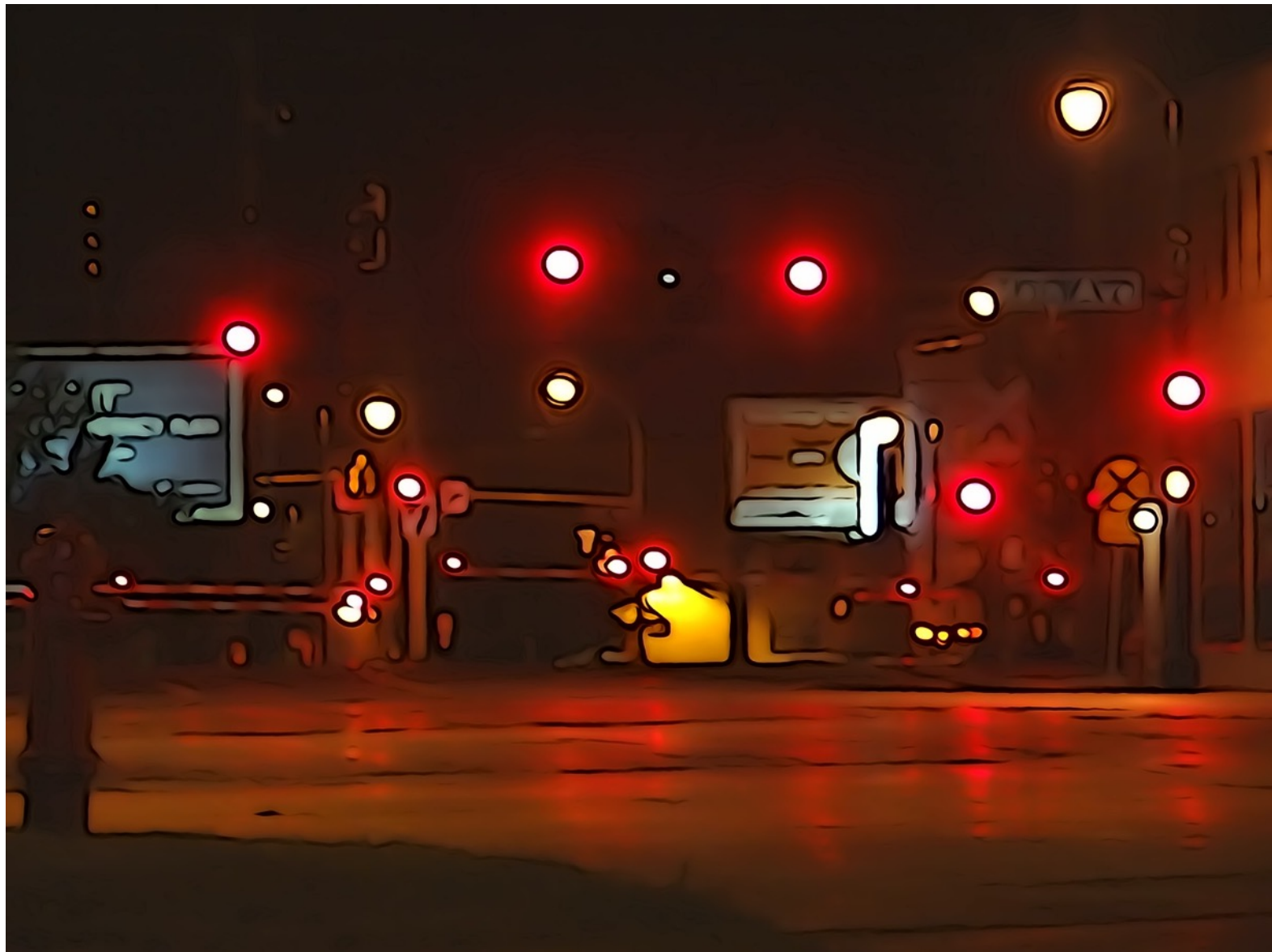
A Midsummer Night's Dream indeed
Could it be this was all the work of fairies?
Impossible to tell...She resolved to fly
once again into the embrace of downtown.

Midsummer nights,
when Robin takes flight
and steals little changelings
for his king.
The heat and haze obscure
Oberon's gaze, as he surveys
his Robin take wing.
Illusion finds home
in this wood risen from loam
natural seeming somewhat
though artificial.
Still fairies inhabit
This park built for rabbits
Titania's presence makes
haunting official.



But no matter wither she wanders, she can find no place of absolute safety





Phantom train
abstain from taking
me away
through the plains
I can't see
though you be
on the tracks
Jack, I will never be
cause you see
you go by
unwitnessed
by gal or guy
still you fly
away, you won't stay
except to say
bye bye
the bars come down
and I frown
path obscured
I abjure
former route
no toot from whistle

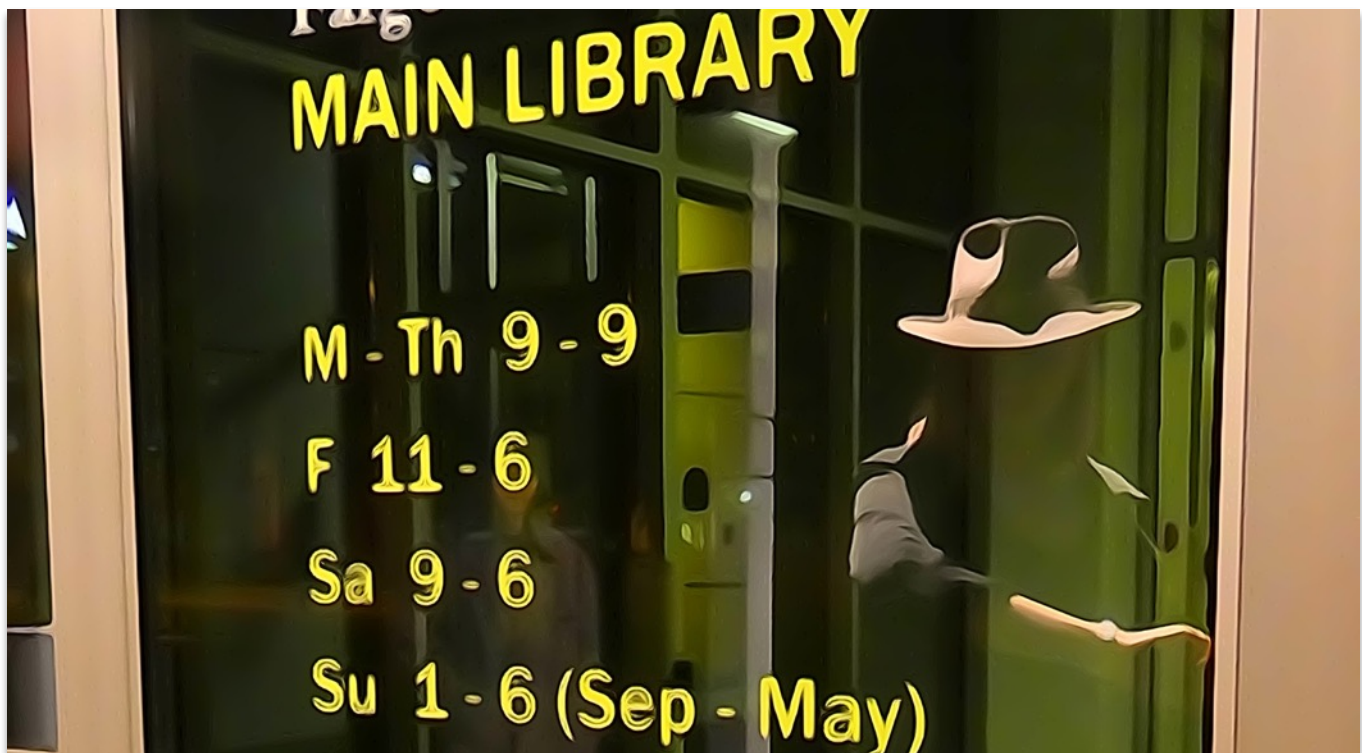
a thistle
in the side
of my ride
as you fly by
without staying
or relating
the reason why
and I die
inside, wondering
why the bars come down
in my town
phantom trains go by
in my mind's eye
I can fly
down the tracks
you by my side
I'm alive
and the five
minutes I been waiting
here, disappear
I'm transported
distorted and contorted

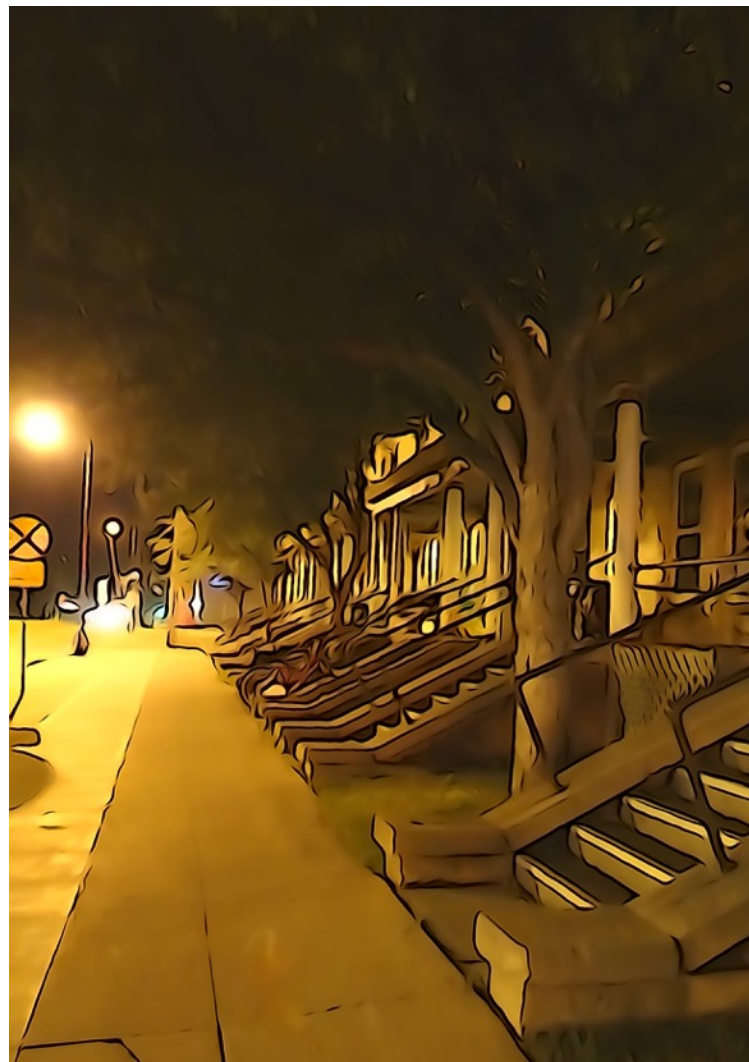
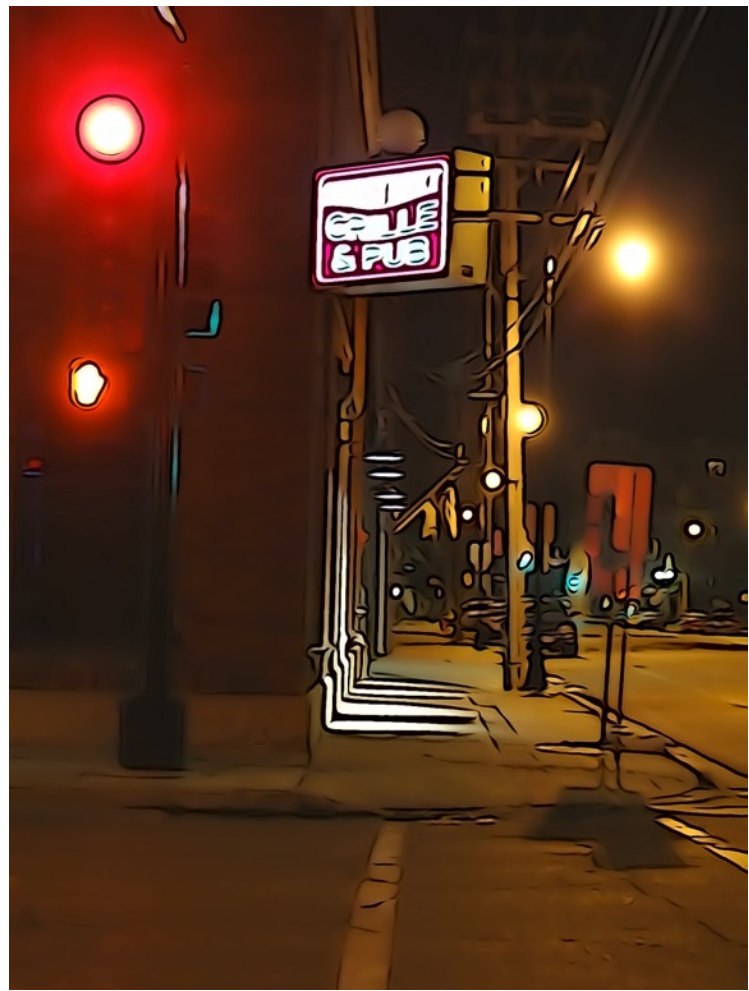
while I'm wondering why
I wait, for invisible forces
on invisible courses
heading for invisible
destinations and places
invisible cargo delivered
and slivers of reality
shivers my mentality
in actuality
I'm not sure
if you even were here
you disappear
from memory
as my journey continues
I forget, you won't let
me remember
the time you stopped
in my town
and I frowned
for my life interrupted
not knowing
that you were showing

alternate realities
where you showed up
and flowed up
the tracks
and I could see
what you delivered
no shivers
only rivers of steel
crossing country
making mundane
your midnight journey
but that is not
what happened
you sapped and
destroyed my memory
now I'm walking
no whistle blowing
throwing away the
memory.

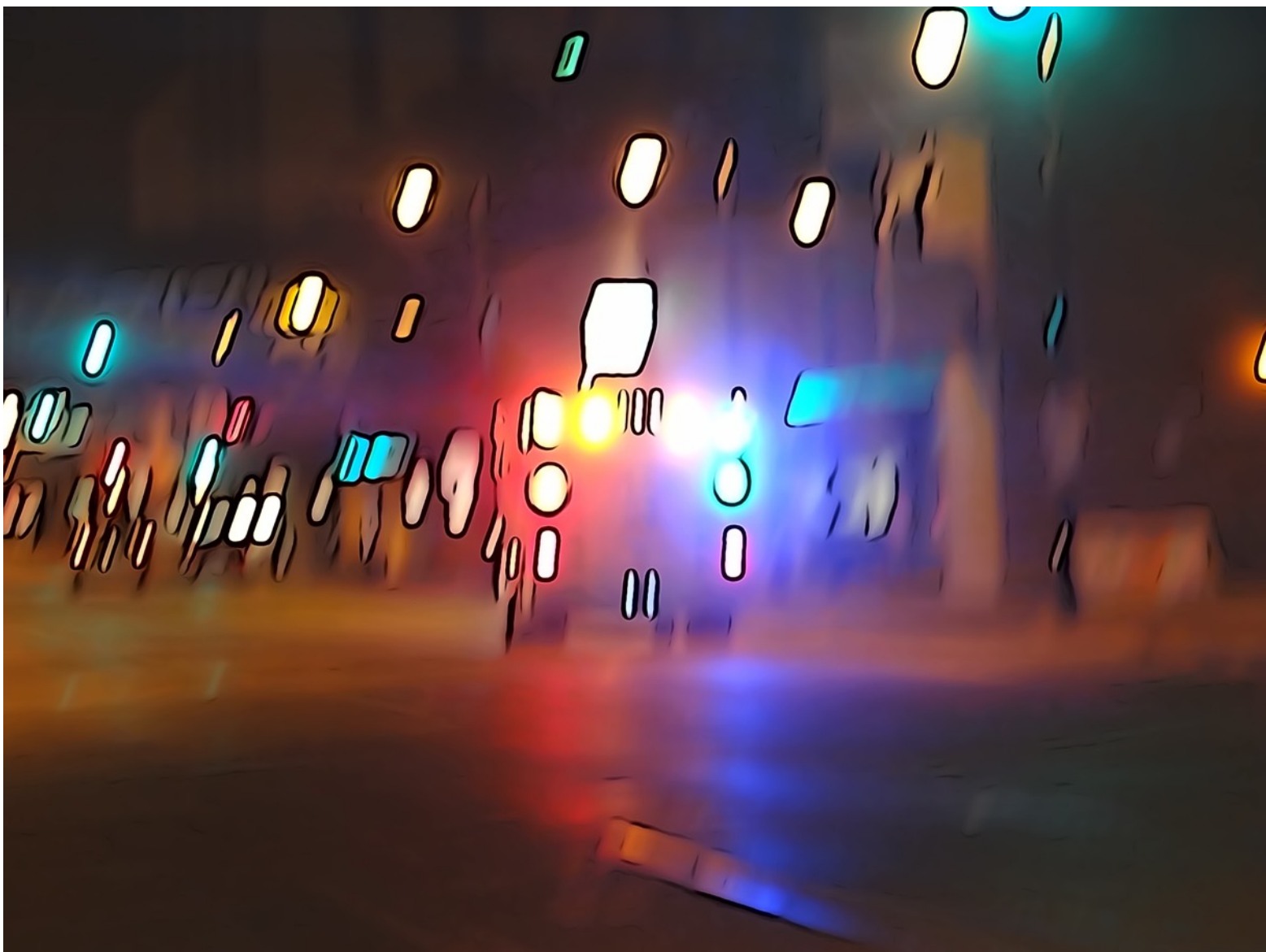


Perhaps the library?





Then her flight was interrupted by the peal of a siren.

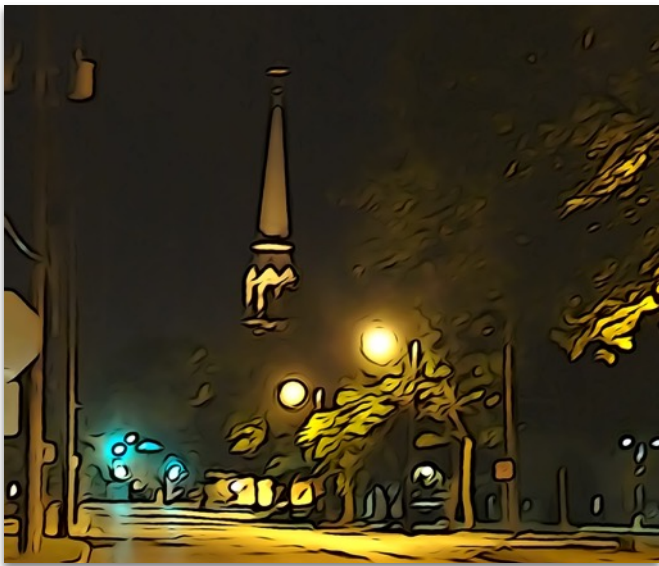




You dropped this



Safe all along, never anything to fear.
This wandering for not, in my city so dear.
Was it for not? I cannot tell... for,
if for not, why feeling so unwell?
Unwell, because as I wandered,
my view of my city was sundered.
I wandered the lonely, empty streets,
enraptured in those self-same city beats,
that e're before I had.
Too blind till now though, had I been
of the suffering from city's sins.
I feared my neighbor when instead,
I should have pledged my daily bread,
toward making safe this lonely place
which nightly homeless must embrace.
If I, who have a home can fear, then who,
of choiceless destitution reared,
can my homeless neighbor turn to?
To you, my friends, to you and you.





Where do THEY
go?

How many did you see?



The Absent Presence, A
Graphic Novel of Fargo

By Luc Chinwongs & Anthony
Albright