

## STEALING FIRE

—after Loving Vincent (2017) and At Eternity's Gate (2018)

*“ . . . but I shall always be cracked.”*

*Vincent Van Gogh, 3 May 1889 letter to brother Theo*

In a vast field of yearning sunflowers,  
the dozen you will pick for a simple yellow  
vase on the table. Gauguin's fancy armchair  
with candle. Cracked old shoes painted  
propped in the doorway. Scatter of crows  
abandons a wheat field. A night of spinning stars.

Such hope in an infinity of twisted stars,  
such joy in the dark faces of sunflowers.  
Black-feathered omens flying—crows  
against ripened grain in fields of yellow.  
Clots of color on old paintbrushes.  
Omens of madness tip over your yellow chair

with simple rush seat. The pairing of two chairs,  
two artists in Arles, two different dreams of stars  
and fame in your yellow house. It won't last. Paint  
tubes, palette and rough easel—fields of sunflowers  
where darkness eases in dreams of yellow  
fire against violet shadows. Blue-black crows

stalk among purple clods of dirt in rows  
of rustling cornstalks. Wait. Dark promise. The chair  
glows with that passion you cultivate for the color yellow—  
cool yellow at center of phosphorescent pinwheels of stars  
in night sky, hot color of incendiary sun,  
even burnt sky at noon above the fields. You paint

the world—a wild poem of combustible paint—  
fractured, twisted, full of joy. You are the bold raven  
who stole embers from the blazing flower of the sun,  
carried inflammatory sparks across indigo skies to share  
with those huddled, without imagination, beneath small stars.  
To share a world of complementing colors—violet and yellow,

pain and joy, oil and water, madness and revelation. Yellow  
house utopian dreams cracked like thick daubs of oil paint,  
dried too quickly. Yet the cracks let in the light of stars.  
Dark figures in landscapes, blackened wings of crows,  
fractures bring incandescent light to charred  
black hearts and burnt-sienna petals of sunflowers.

Conflagration of stars ignites imagination. Inferno of yellow  
sunflowers burns in your bequest to a world you set on fire—  
sooty-feathered arsonist, with smoldering eye, on an ochre chair.

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