

Gabriel and the Virgin: Fra Angelico's Annunciation

I see they're made for each other—
though he's only a stand-in for God—
a Captain Smith, or a Cyrano.

They could be sister and brother,
the way their arms fold over their
breasts in secret semaphore;
their slippered feet peeking out
from under their robes; twin
coils of hair framing their faces.

The only difference is that feathered
artifice between his shoulder blades,
stylish and smooth as sateen.

I want to stroke it, like the soft wings
of the hens that follow me in the yard
at home, pecking the dirt, clucking
and boasting *egg* every noon.

I knew I'd never be as pure as these two,
angel and virgin, because once I heard
the shuddering of an owl's wings
as it landed nearby, concussing the air,
the cry of fear as the hawk swooped
down, and, with two sharp talons,
embraced the vole.



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