

UNDERPAINTING

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In the kitchen we whistle with the kettle. Our shoulders slump in our chairs. We need to buy salt. Sometimes we still laugh. All the smoke blowing strangely, sideways. Following us. Later, when the room is full of smoke, it hangs perfectly still as if waiting for us to speak; as if we were in a painting without knowing it. In the painting, your hands would not be as hard and never curl themselves into fists. The light should slant on both of us equally, and we should look lit from within, our skin soap-commercial clear, my brows perfectly plucked. People who would never debate about which book to do rails off of. The folds in the blankets behind us should cascade like togas on statues. The room's composition as well-balanced as our guileless faces in the painting, turned toward each other at three-quarters.

But there are things you should know. One thing: my voice doesn't waver when I lie anymore. There is so much we don't notice. Under the table, there are feet and legs wriggling. The upper halves of the bodies do not move. How much I wanted to be left alone. How much there is of lonely in strangeness. Another thing: she took the furniture when she left, so there are lawn chairs to sit on, but I don't mind. I have been sitting here a long time—years, maybe.

Quiet fires burning strange, casting a second set of shadows in the room. I want to say, tell me who to love. Make me the muddy water

of your well. I do not care about clean things the way she did—I know we are not that. Let the painting show us leaning toward each other. In the painting, what we are doing should look like a good idea. I should look like someone who is good, who would never make a man hurt her. You'd look like someone who never would. How much there is of lonely in strangeness. It ought to show us like people who would bake things for fun, things not from a pre-mixed box and/or containing scheduled substances. Who would spend their Sundays scrapbooking and watching the game with their folks. Who do not shake sometimes, mornings. It should show us as people who would have Christmas cards printed, who would, indeed, take the photo in this very room, the smoke making us glow. With a pet and/or small child. As if I would sign it from all of us, with a heart dotting the I.