

Hills, South Truro

It's a drizzly Sunday afternoon
and to relieve it our neighbors
across the street are having sex.
Having sex because making love
on a day like today just wouldn't cut it.
Or so they seem to believe. And good for them,
I say, except that it makes all of us
watching from our window secretly wish
that the roles here could somehow be reversed,
that the painting could become the patron.
They might not be at it, after all,
given that he's sitting down, she's on top,
and we can't really see anything
except speculation— but then
she takes off her sweater
and his face falls forward like an elm.
After that there is nothing but the body.

We should make popcorn, someone suggests,
and we all laugh, because we need
something else to do besides stare,
something to cover our swift and solemn
nakedness. It's a scene we've all seen before,
a scene Hopper painted a thousand times—
people staring out of windows, others looking in—
year after year he painted it, but never any sex,
unless you count "Summer in the City"
with the man lying prone upon the bed,
and the woman standing blankly at the window
as though all the sex has just been drained
out of her, and we're not entirely sure by whom,
maybe him, maybe herself, maybe someone
we don't even know anything about,
maybe that awful window in that awful room,
or all the times she's looked out of it
or maybe just at it, the times
its cloudy mirror shows only herself
and the hundred other women
Hopper painted in the same room,
the same house, the same cut glass.
So we wonder if we're the misplaced lover, then,
someone who stopped in for a quick fix
on a chilly afternoon and has since
stepped outside the edge of the canvas,
leaving her to her situation. Here, now,
in this apartment, watching the raw unfold before us,
I'm starting to believe Hopper knew
that in the end there is no other situation,

we're all only ever hungry to look,
or be looked at, like this quiet, lonely couple
who are now finishing but who didn't know
they were listened to through the wall,
their roommates' ears pressed flat against the paint.
We could see them do it from across the street—
were they envious? Disgusted? Or merely curious
in the way that the revelation of the body,
of any body, can make us—sadly,
the show's over, though whether there's
more sadness in this apartment or in that one
I can't quite tell. The light is fading anyway,
the clouds have loosened a little from the sky,
and somewhere in Truro, a woman
at a window notices something new
from the corner of her eye.

Benjamin Morris