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In Praise of Famous Men

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IN PRAISE OF FAMOUS MEN

I met my grandfather in the Smithsonian,
American Art Archives — West. Framed,
covered with dust, they had to set him
upright. Like the Depression years,
when Wurlitzer pianos didn't need
his commercial art. He grabbed
the nearest job: Hamilton, Montana,
painting ticks. For posterity:
Paint the Flatheads.
Show the folks back home
how the last few buffalo skins
are scraped, the berries crushed
for pemican. How when life gets hard,
you get up, say you are going
to the store for bread.
Years later, your family gets
one postcard: hello,
good-bye.

In this painting, *Saturday Night Dance*,
the dancers strike up polkas, red swirls
against the black Montana night.
A woman's skirt flies up, she turns
around. Her partner watches
the redhead in pink across the room.
Their faces sweat, the music
is getting louder. In the muddy
background, a man leans up
against the wall, stares at the dancers,
his only hand in his pocket.
That man is you, Tom Moore.
The heavy wooden door opens
into the smoky room, out
to a night speckled with stars
you could never paint.

A girl with long, black braids
swings in, her dress brushes
her bony knees. She is calling
you home. You are already
turning away.