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Two Women Drinking Coffee

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TWO WOMEN DRINKING COFFEE

Though eye to mouth's the usual link, a yen for the lemons
or liquor on Vuillard's table, this time it's eyes to fingers,
which tickle and need a good rub; he wants to touch to see
if touch will turn a line of lime-green (the hem of linen
patting a woman's knee), to a memory of rabbits
in a field from the story his daughter penned like a fence
on her bedroom wall, which he can't understand
how he's forgotten, and knows he should remember

Sleepy in the room's flush humidity, a younger woman forgets
herself and tips forward as if to press glass against canvas
with enough pressure to unleash any moisture still in the desert
oils; then it's nifty recollection of a game of *Statues*, when they spun
each other in the green light of early evening into whatever they wanted
to be--ferry-captain or fire-eater, say--though the real labor was to resist
bath and bed of grass growing dark, easy in their ignorance of this
first fall to shapes their lives might fail to keep

But with few failures left, a man old before anything else,
and dressed politely in his brown suit for strangers who part
the sidewalk, is grateful he can't touch as the painting startles
this morning; through spotted and soiled glasses, he sees
what he missed last time: the arousing curve of his girlfriend's
backside, a three-quarter view in muted collage for bone sunk beneath
a perfect wave of fat, beneath the only skin on her body un-freckled,
and almost green, like the green in flesh that painters see

Olive green for the guard, so it's the flesh and oil of fruit
he imagines Vuillard has turned to wallpaper; and the women's
frocks are mustard, beer-bitter, and coarse at their edges; every day
he nibbles at what the painter has left, reaches for the bowl of sweet
coffee haunting table and toast, stews over meddlers elsewhere
in the house, and listens to the women's languor. And just before
closing,
he does what no one else can: warbles *hush little ladies*, then kisses
their fat, sad cheeks a very saucy goodnight.