

LADY STANDING AT A VIRGINAL

Where is the blue, the yellow?
The lady is dressed in peachskin. An eye drunk
on the clash of primary colors
will find this juxtaposition of fruity silk
and the grayish aquamarine
of the chair seat, the lady's shawl and cap,
too irresolute, too mild.
Those squat Dutch faces are gone; this lady's face
flowers with Englishness. Her heart is revealed

as she half-turns and gazes
at the painter. As though we could mistake that look,
a study of Cupid hangs on the wall
behind her. The care with which Vermeer has set
her curls, this time no half-bald
skull gleaming with light, may mean her gaze
was meant for him; or it may not.
Even the homely girls glow with love; their love;
Vermeer's love. It is the viewer who is caught.

— Roger Finch

Tokyo Japan

MY CLOTHES

Did my clothes do me wrong? No, never.
Then why is it such pleasure
to take them off?
I unbuckle my watch and lay it
across the dresser in the dim bedroom.
Time is dismissed!
What about my leather jacket?
I really like it but my own skin is warmer,
certainly more familiar.
I shed my leather jacket and hang it on a wooden hanger.
Its elbows do not go limp.
In fact, it looks rather jaunty,
or possibly contentious, (even without me).
Relax, jacket. There's always tomorrow.
I remove the turquoise ring from my right little finger.
It goes in a box with other rings, where they gossip
in round, bright voices about my hands.
Rings are such busybodies.

This sweater is rough like a towel
and comes off with a tug over my head,

like an easy birth.
I bend and unfasten my sandals.
Stepping down from their slight eminence,
I lift my sandals by the heel straps
and sling them into position, side by side,
in the closet. They'll never be lonely.
Shoes are the twins among garments
and finish each other's sentences.

For economy of motion, skirt, stockings, underpants
come off all at once, but I separate them.
It's a small quarrel, easily ignored.
Skirt, go to bed. Stockings, drape over the chair.
Underpants, into the corner with you.
I'll deal with you all later.
Good night clothes. Until tomorrow.

THE HENS THAT CAME WITH THE PLACE

We've bought a farm,
a little twenty-acre farm;
it came with chickens. Eleven hens.
Mornings, these hens
come out to cluck at us,
and if they're out of food or water
and in a mood for grouching,
they cluck very sternly.

With a dim-witted but serious look,
they stand at the chicken-wire fence
and go raawk, raaawk, raaaaawk,
until, like childish gods who've been off playing
with thunderbolts,
we realize,
we're guilty.

I've never had chickens before.
Once I had a chick
a neighbor lady gave me.
I was only four.
The chick got sick and was no more,
but I remember its inverted eyelid,
wonder of that small world.
Its sleepy sickly closing
like the eyes of a red-haired boy I knew,
or the turgid closing
of the eye on an immobile miniature alligator
displayed downtown in the dusty window
of an insurance company along with
a triptych of pictures (a wreck,
a tornado, an earthquake)