

Lucia Perillo

For Edward Hopper, from the Floor

What I like about the women in Hopper's paintings
 is their being given postures anyone could hold — no need
 to lie on your side propped up on an elbow,
 rotating your head until its gaze is directed
 backwards athwart your shoulder, a pose
 figuring so prominently in the book of nudes
 you might be tempted to try it, as I was, on the floor.
 And hear a muffled unknuckling, as though the \$20 bills
 you've been giving the chiropractor to wad in your spine
 have all come unchinked as from old cabin boards,
 only it's you there issuing the noise the wind makes
 groaning through. The chiropractor: call him Dr. Bruce
 to distinguish him from his brothers Drs. Bob and Bill —
 at lunch they all go out running together
 like a pack of raindrops falling from one cloud.
 And just to see them makes my bones ache, the way seeing
 the old women who scrub tile floors in Mexican hotels
 pangs the rubber band stretched in the balsa wood on my chest
 because I know should I get down beside them
 within a half hour my knees would be locked
 underrib in perpetuity, like the Land O' Lakes maiden's.

But Hopper will let you just sit there, slumped
 in that very unergonomic chair, sobering in light
 from a not too difficult sun, and you don't have
 to be slender. And you don't have to pretend
 that the collie dog standing chest-deep in the grass
 doesn't secretly irritate you with her virtues.
 And Dr. Bruce will not crawl into that space
 between the hotel dresser and the narrow hotel bed
 to demonstrate stomach crunches or those doggie exercises

supposed to pop your sacral vertebrae back in place.
Or Dr. Bob, Dr. Bill — but for the color of their nylon shoes
they are interchangeable, the way Hopper's women
all share the body of his wife Jo, whom he drew
often with a crumbly rust-colored crayon
called sanguine, I've learned: after the French for blood.