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Lost Hopper

*The vision of a scene—each stroke
destroys it more and more.*

—Jo Hopper, quoting Edward

It's the late '50s, and Edward Hopper
visits a schoolhouse on Cape Cod

and weeks later begins to work.
He remembers the well-groomed children,

the rows of desks, the one boy
who was told to stay late.

At first he makes drawings,
the canvas where he can see it

though still untouched, then calls it
"After School, 3 p.m."

and all summer works slowly,
but one cold morning abandons it,

and after the artist's death
his ledgers list nothing with that title,

and even his wife's bequest
can't bring it down from any attic.

For now, he's posed Josephine
standing calmly in bright sunlight,

in the foreground of a classroom
and once more made her young.

The boy, the empty desks around him,
the window with its one cloud

—is everything she'll see.
And the child, sitting up,

looks only at her, his hands together,
his features merely suggested,

as if her memory of him
is beginning to fade.