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Figure-Ground James Finnegan

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James Finnegan

FIGURE-GROUND

She'd walk through our house in a bathrobe, breasts loose under folds of terrycloth. She was tall, I remember, her features elongated, almost a Modigliani in her looks. She stood full in front of me once, hands at the knotted belt of her robe as though she were about to untie it, letting it drop around her feet. But instead she just asked—"Where's your bathroom?" You see she was a model. And my wife, an artist, her employer. In the winter she'd come inside from the garage studio to warm up, sometimes get a cup of tea. Nothing ever happened more than casual talk between us. Then one day she was dead. A road-grader having backed over her while she worked construction as a flagger. One of those odd and deadly accidents that happen in the full light of everyday. Now and again she appears to me, not in dream or as some shadowy apparition, but reclining naked and eternally lovely before my eyes, in the drawing that hangs on an otherwise unremarkable wall inside our house. Her body now approaching, now receding. A problem of figure-ground. And if she is speaking, I cannot hear her under the glass, though when I place my finger-tip over her mouth, it leaves a mark not unlike warm breath on a cold windowpane.