

Hanging the Pictures · *Madeline DeFrees*

Every day I hang a different picture. They are
mostly the same— Vermeer's girl
in blue turban— a woman, clothed or not,
looks from the matte into distance, the first time
knowing her name.

What holds together or binds,
syllables roll on the tongue. No matter
how late, how ordinary or not, the given
covers the rapt body, wine-colored dress— Dolce—
lowered into light.

Figures assume a shape she has
always practised, cat and cricket shut out
where sleep cannot touch them. The other night,
good luck in the house, I killed a cricket, the second
one got away.

The left-handed woman whose thought
is awash on my wall, and the tree that is always a woman
held in the storm's wake, a sky
not her own and larger: they are the same white
body of the charcoal nude who brings back the strait
and the water's precision, gradually louder, lapping
ashore. I drive two nails into wood to hang her.
On the floor Modigliani's red-haired woman
falls forward into the room's frame and a black
leap I recognize but cannot stop from singing.