

Covert

You experience
the crumbling shack,

hear the first
four pairs of centipede

legs scratch
beneath the snippets wall-

papered with newsprint,
and maybe no one

describes what they
hear—piano music

will surely replace it—
forgetting that

short, dense feathers
span to translucent tips.

Disappearing Act

after Vermeer's "*Officer and Laughing Girl*"

Because the real subject of the painting
is light, the shred of his profile

foils her face, too engaged in what he's
saying about light not being a metaphor

for time. What if she asked *where is the*
density located but couldn't respond

upper-left-shoulder into palm. Who can see
without zooming in that the real quality

of her hands is not the light falling there
but the palms daubed with it as if

reciprocity is not a thing.
The same gold cascades down her

sleeves. Are there trees
outside? You can't work around him.

On Aspiration

To make the small repeat
motion of uprooting

grasses easier, one nester
mortgages the tractor

and one-way plow,
intentionally yielding

standard bushels he can't
quit despite incurable

silicosis—
you are filled with dirt

the doctor explains,
prescribing

off the furrow.

On Containment

A year after teams of rescuers pulled him out of the collapsed mountain, Vega put on a mining helmet again.

-Héctor Tobar, "Sixty-Nine Days"

After rebuilding
his chest, so his clavicle

relaxed somewhat into
flesh, Vega opted

to go back—no cure
but work.

I imagine him,
slanted in the truck bed,

illuminated
by the new head

lamps: no landscape reflects
the shadows of his

arms and legs so sharply as
rock corporations

are paying him to
search. Is he triggered

by distant rumblings—
nothing he can peg as

beneath the wages he'll
win upon deliverance.

The Ongoing Moment

Beyond the frame lines,
the remnant refusing voluntary
resettlement is aflame in pockets
of resistance—pistol-wielding females

with grenades in
their underpants are ripe for
photographing, except
the evidence isn't here. Only pearls strung

around her neck, the buttons of her blouse
and newsboy cap
may be poured
over: a humanness the caption

must contradict. Even beyond Stroop's
family album a haunted
man calls her *Mona Lisa*
as if her far-off look isn't practically-

minded: which one is he going
to shoot? Here is where pressure bottles up
and the floating patch
that had hovered near the actual image

collides like wood with her friend's
neurocranium. Zero-shaped hands blur
the frame lines, generous to include
fishtail braid and narrow boots.

Who Shall Say

In one woman's letter
about the Dust Bowl

she has the same
reticence the audio-

book tells me
to lose. *Who*

shall say
if perseverance

is inertia
is a question I've

asked out of fear.
Then waited for some

one to skim this
other-

wise clean water.