

Story Draft

I was a landlady a long time.
It seems I never did enough dusting,
was grouchy, often mean with the meals.
I hung my totems and tress in the hallways.
On occasion I found my epiphanies
knocked askew, turned to the wall.

My studio I made a room of my own.
I hoisted chairs to each corner
on a homemade rigging on pulleys
and string. Beneath them I worked;
their cobwebbed backs would shimmer
like wings, angels patiently watching.
Worthwhile visitors I would bless,
quickly offer a seat. The fools
I let stand, hoping they'd leave.

One day, before it struck me
my work was at all known,
I heard a knock at my door.
My hair in a kerchief,
my painting dress smelling freshly of turps,
I found on the steps a creature
jazzed up in a great hat,
face hidden under a flutter of ribbons.

You must be the painter, Miss Emily Carr,
it suggested, cocking head and hat
to the right. It wanted to buy.
Fearing a weakness for posies
drooping under the weight of pastel,
I ushered it in.

What catches your eye, I ventured,
Trees, it said,
branches adrift in the wind.
I pulled out a canvas.
It was taken aback.
I pulled out some sketches.
Seeing God in each one,
it oohed and it aahed,
collapsed into a chair
dropped without warning behind it.
Removing its hat, a woman's eyes
looked straight into mine.
Finally she chose four little pines
I worked hard at stirring
aware of the forest moving in
on cats' feet behind them.

Ten dollars in my pocket
and the woman rehatted, I hurried her out.
My tenants suspiciously eyed
the brown square of paper tucked under her arm.

That night I feted my sisters well on pork loin.

— *John Barton*