

MARY RUTHERFORD  
**DINNER FOR ONE**

An art gallery in the country, paintings by Mary Pratt.

To be truthful, I'm not present, I'm in my head,  
full of gloom, agitating my husband's death. That is,  
until one painting speaks to me of loneliness.

"Dinner for One": a table set for one, one knife and fork,  
one plate, one glass, one flowered napkin, one casserole dish.  
I can't restrain myself, step into the picture, pull out a chair,  
and break the silence. *I hope you don't mind my intrusion,*  
*but I have a question. Is this dinner for you?*

*Yes, she answers. It's rather sad. And what, if I may ask,*  
*is in that casserole? A cooked chicken from the supermarket,*  
she replies, looking just a little guilty. Sheepishly

I admit to buying precooked meals myself and even  
watching television while I eat. She nods sympathetically  
and suddenly I am not alone. We reminisce. She recalls  
cooking for her busy family, serving from the kitchen,  
plates heaped with bright, hot meals, chatter and good times.

I confide how my husband created his masterpiece, chicken curry,  
brought it to the table, piping hot, how we dined  
in comfortable silence, replete with candelabra, wine,  
a centrepiece of flowers. A far cry from our present evening rite  
where an unwanted guest relaxes in our partner's chair.