

Underpainting

Emma Dobigny has no idea
she'll be discovered

standing on her head underneath
"Portrait of a Woman"

a century after she agrees for a few francs
to model in Degas' frigid studio.

She'd like to peel back paint,
quit modeling, Paris,

wear many layers of clothing,
climb out of her portrait.

We'd like to climb out of our photograph—
oak tree, porch, front steps in summer,

which we know because we're three girls wearing
practically nothing—not even bathing suit tops.

We've inherited suits from a boy
whose absence still spreads

like Emma Dobigny's shadow
across the face of an anonymous woman

struck with light a million times brighter
than the sun,

traveling on a beam one-tenth the diameter
of a human hair.

If that boy came back to us,
boy with his bright face,

if that boy

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