

Before the Great Master

Her wrist, a small flesh tube
that sprouted gnarled fingers,
clutched the child-size wheelchair;
the other hand dangled
above her puny lap,
wrinkled beneath the hunch
and knob that was her back.

Her arms too withered, mangled
to propel the steel chair,
she pedalled the ground, her feet
clacking over the tiled museum floor,
shuttling her crumpled form
straight to the biggest frame

centred in the largest gallery.
Clumps of art-goers plodded by,
paused, wavering on straight legs
behind this wheeled woman who
sought out Van Dyck's fantasy.

Standing, anonymous, I watched.

There, gazing at the flowing maroons
and golds, her imagination swirled
with Christian myth, tropical
island love, winged infant angels
on clouds, and the lushness
of love writhing in motion.

Hers was the only figure held
by the Flemish masterpiece.
All other eyes grappled with the
tiny and twisted creature, our pity
carving us into unblinking facades
to add to the other wooden portraits.

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