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Self-Portrait with Statue of a Hawk, and: Self-Portrait as Ornament

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Self-Portrait with Statue of a Hawk

Some days I stare into the mirror like a movie character. I could talk to my reflection, but what to say? I use a wand to paint two midnight lines across my eyelids. If the wand shakes, I get two Rorschachs. Don't think, I think.

There are reasons why a lake might freeze: hardheartedness, a desire to reflect, boredom. Reasons why the hawk perched on the roof of that crumbling brownstone never moves. In the landscapes of Hendrick Avercamp the lake is always frozen. Unclear, though, whether the villagers skating across the lake with their baskets and their plummy cloaks are having the time of their lives because now they can go wherever they want or because now they realize how the end of the world will look: cold but sunny.

Some days I prefer leafless trees. They're like those ancient women who stand around in the gym locker room, buck naked, skin steaming a little after a shower, toes soft—ever so slightly taloned—gripping their snowy patch of towel.

Self-Portrait as Ornament

Say you were a sink. Say you had a pedestal. And your walls, high and lovely, were engineered to release the water that came tumbling down each day into your drain. What is a mouth, anyway? Though you remember how to pray. How you sat with that blond boy, holding hands beneath a tree, asking Heavenly Father to pierce the hearts of your unbelieving friends. Now you watch the squirrels leap from branch to branch and listen to the wind tossing supple golden leaves of the oak from where you stand, affixed to drywall. Your dream? No longer whisking off your daily damages through pipes, those switchboard circuits, no longer being sturdy, worthy, useful—just an ornament. But how would you endure those vapid hours simply crouched in your sunlit corner, wordlessly absorbing space?

