

Son,

You know, Gabe, ever since we had that conversation about my grandmother braiding those oval rugs from strips of her daughters' ruined stockings, occasioned by the exhibit at that college gallery of crocheted lamp wire sculptures, each nesting a speaker, size of a Beechnut chaw-tin, like her husband used to keep in his vest fob pocket, from which speaker came a tinny stream of some family anecdote, I have been searching for that old 2"x21/2" black and white photo of said activity in all the old albums—Sparta, Dover, Garfield, Helen, Ann, Annie—but have come up empty handed, so I'll just have to rely on memories of that tableau, first as participant, then as possessor of the last of those rugs, on the floor of my in-home dorm room, there when she died just months after Dad passed away, around the corner in the house her working daughters bought for her and Pops in the Thirties, and ultimately as processor of that image in a conflation with Manet's "Le déjeuner sur l'herbe"—an odd association, I know, and certainly not because Granma's revealing costume reminded me of the nude Suzanne, the artist's wife; no, she wore the ubiquitous, shapeless flowered house dress; but because of her confrontational stare at the camera (aimed by her husband, I suppose, because I associate the activity with a midweek summer afternoon ["the two most beautiful words in the English language," according to Henry James] a time when "the boys," my father and Uncle Otts would be at work), a look that over time has come to state: "this is the way I reweave to domesticity the strands of their lives—Babe and Toots—since they left the farm for the office jobs in the big city, with its pop culture of bobs and rouge, sheet music and amateur theatricals at the Elks Lodge, driving (imagine!—even Ann) and spooning," a knuckly fist around the scissors, a nest of resultant ribbons at her nun-shoed feet, with them sitting there, as disconnected from her craft as Manet's brother Eugene and brother-in-law-to-be Ferdinand, formally dressed, deep in discussion, are from stitchless Suzanne at their shoulder; instead the daughters engage in small talk, flip through Ladies Home Journal, linger over Bazaar, reminisce maybe, tease/tousle/tsk-tsk me as I plow my fire trucks and army tanks through rainbow fields of fabric; but has this tableau been staged in my imagination as the quintessence of these three from first perception to mature appreciation (too unassuming for the Graces, too generous for the Fates), as Manet painted his "sur l'herbe" in his studio? has the photo ever existed except as a niggling notion which over time is naced over into something precious, something sacred?

YOM