

## Portrait of a Young Lady

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“Say we never get to see it: bright  
future, stuck like a bum star, never  
coming close, never dazzling.”

– Ada Limón, “The Conditional”

You're having a drink with a friend  
and while she has a clear end goal  
for her dating, you do not, and she  
asks what will happen if you fall  
in love. You don't know what will  
happen, tell her you're terrified,  
remember that you are still the same  
person who moved in with a man  
two weeks after meeting him.  
She has the opposite fear, that  
it will never happen, and you both  
consider the possibilities, sipping  
your drinks. A few days ago you  
visited the Art Institute on your own,  
went first to Paulus Moreelse's *Portrait  
of a Young Lady* where you gazed  
raptly into her eyes, stood as close  
as you could get, whispering that  
you needed her guidance. That pale  
face above the dense lace collar  
and puffed red and black sleeves,  
above the profusion of gold and pearls,  
ribbons and gemstones, seemed to grow  
more enigmatic and you were sure  
she was telling you that you already  
knew the answer, and you, in turn,  
revealed a secret you haven't  
confided to your closest friends,  
can't even manage to put in this poem.

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