

Foligno

I would have liked the name Anne
at my confirmation, but I didn't want to be
confused with the women of Constantinople, their solitude
and celibacy didn't suit me even then.
I chose Angela because she lived wild
until she saw His fullness, brilliant
like a star. I wanted grace
in bodily form. To rest ablaze
in an embrace surpassing the blush
of proddings in the back
seats of cars, moist
with the flow and rhythm
of precious blood.

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Grand Silence

It begins a little past six every night.
Moving from room to room,
we avoid speaking to each other,
lose ourselves in whatever we find
to pass the time. Nuns used to do this,
so they could talk to God undisturbed, undistracted.
That was before the Second Council
decided to free the Sisters
of the bondage of their habits, and their habits.
Kneeling by my bed when was I little, I'd recite
a generic prayer about sleeping and waking
and dying somewhere in between.
My mother never made us do this, but she must have
taught us the words. I can remember
looking up at the ceiling, asking God if he was there.
The only response came from my parents'
television: Johnny Carson welcoming another guest.
Now it's Letterman I sometimes watch
on nights we consider laughing together,
sitting in the same room. I know what he thinks about
God. I believe in him.

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Holy Water

The first morning after, I climbed
into my parent's shower and ran it hot,
my skin could take it.
Steam rose around me like prayers
I believed could evaporate
the feeling of his hands, the pressure
of his weight. Getting undressed,
I had seen my reflection and couldn't forgive
how innocent I looked; confessing
didn't help. And the next morning, I repeated the ritual
until my skin was red and wrinkled.
My repentance became bitter
appeals for understanding. Why he sacrificed me
when I was so young. I became a martyr
for nothing. For him. Saint Jude,
I became your daughter through baptism.

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Make Believe

Sometimes I pretend I have a brother.
He is older than me, stronger. He knows
his little sister gets in trouble,
but he loves her. Helps get her out
of the house they both grew up in
before she becomes cynical,
like him. She wants to write
stories about their family, poems
with a razor's edge at your wrist
flavor that spells out why they left.
When she can't sleep he washes
her throat with warm liquids. Nervously listens
to the rattle in her chest when she's sick.
Holds her hand across the rails of the hospital bed,
her coffin. Home to his parents
he blames them for everything,
writes it all down for her.

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Northwest Drive

A tattered fence ran
down the length of our backyard
at the first house I can remember
living in. Its pleats
were pliable, green and white,
plastic like horizontal blinds on house windows
in the better parts of town. Our duplex
had curtains. Heavy cream
fabric stretched across windows
kept the prying sunlight out, hid
my mother darning socks
during the evening news. Carter was busy
bartering oil for lives. We watched hostages blindfolded
on our nine inch black and white, hands atop their heads,
paraded into daylight by dark-haired men
we learned to hate, the sound of guns
as another President was shot. I played
Streisand, lip-synched
Second Hand Rose in my mother's highest heels
and a leopard print half-slip. My father sold
auto parts in foundries around the country,
but when he came home my mother would send me outside,
locking the door behind me so I couldn't get back in
until she called. I wasn't supposed to leave the yard
even though we lived on the last block of a dead end
street full of houses, just like ours. I peered through slits in the fence,
fit my fingers in their creases and pretended
I too needed rescuing.

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Sanctity

Cundegund is Butler's sufferer today.
Her imperial robes adorn pages.
The *Lives of the Saints* teach us
to meekly cast off pride like the shedding of garments
at an altar. She forgave Judith
her glutinous sin, marked her for life
with rose imprints from slender fingers.
What similar offering can I make? A portion of
the true cross she sacrificed is not mine
to give. Forgiveness
does not spread from me easily
when I think of those who have dined on my good
intentions. Dishonorable,
I want to place my touch upon them,
brand their faces with a reminder of the way
they have treated me.

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Scarlet Letter

Indelible red marker in the shape of an A
used to distinguish my clothes
from my sister's. Small print
covered the scratchy tags, sometimes standing on end
without my knowing it. My parents had friends
who called me A and her B, as if
she were a lexical continuation of me
and we formed a discernable pattern,
but we didn't. And it wasn't
until a boy told me he liked my name
that I forgave my parents
for granting her, Samantha,
the sway of her S.
His name flashes in and out of my mind like strobe lights
on the roller rink floor where we couple-skated;
I was always the one who went backwards.

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