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GIRLS AT CONFIRMATION

They are scraps of lace, a dressmaker’s ribbon unspooled, despoiled. From where the congregation stands they’re grained with dust and distance. That first communion, its discomfitting clichés: demure hands,

the rustle of best dresses, a flurry as angel-moths flutter up the aisle toward a myth of heavenly incandescence, each pretty mouth open for the tang of flesh and blood. As if

suffering could be traded with such innocence!

Seen from above, through God’s fish-eye lens:

the girls in marriage whites, their parents

a blur of benevolence under the granite saint’s

grey-blue regard, his oriental smile on the verge of sensuality. Dome-light rests its lance gently on the priest’s shoulder. And hands

press host to tongue, hands urge

them back into the sun again. Already, in a borrowed car, and out all afternoon, perhaps on Lovers’ Hill, they sit remotely, overlooking the stagger of houses and spires, feeling dreamy, restless, evil.