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## The Nine Choirs

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## The Nine Choirs · *Len Roberts*

Michael weighed the souls of the dead,  
Gabriel announced birth after birth,  
    twelve legions  
gathered on the head of a pin,  
on the blackboard where Ann Harding  
wrote the nine choirs, from lowly angel  
    up to seraphim,  
the girl with the largest breasts  
    and curved legs,  
the one who walked into the dark  
alley with Ronny Michaels and did not  
    want to come back out.  
Invisible, unapproachable, unaffected  
    by our needs,  
they came with God's Word, all light  
    and radiance,  
to roll back the stone from the tomb,  
cast the millstone into the sea,  
capable of anything although they had  
    no bodies,  
making me whisper my brother had been raped,  
that my other brother was in a far country,  
    leaping from planes. Reaching  
out my hands to either side, I tried to touch  
my Angel of Wickedness, my Angel of Justice,  
willing to side with the one who helped,  
willing to curse and swear, to drink the holy  
    wine before serving mass,  
willing to call upon Blackness itself those  
early Saturday mornings I held Christ's blood,  
    three times circling the coffin.  
Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, I called them up,  
and the fourth, unsanctified, one we weren't supposed to  
    know, Uriel, the angel with the sharpest sight,

and, finally, Satan, whose black wings I'd felt  
in my black house every night,  
knowing they would never appear in human form,  
knowing they'd come the way they wanted to  
even as Sister flapped her black-robed arms in the wafting  
chalk dust and said  
an angel would come at the moment of our death to lead us  
into Heaven or Hell,  
and I turned around to see Al Aldon going up in flames.  
Jackie Schuster smoldering on a spit,  
his greasy hair sparking with light, his mouth twisted  
with sin  
while Gabriella Wells and Irene Tousignant grew white wings,  
their chests, their legs  
covered completely with glaring white robes, their hair  
neatly curled  
as they slowly ascended behind Sister Maria's fading form,  
Johnny Dumas, who would lose his legs in eight years, set  
in a giant angel's palm,  
Richie Reese screaming for another sandwich as two small  
angels carried him off,  
that classroom so filled with wings I could not breathe,  
knowing that angels themselves could sin, that I once may  
have been an angel myself,  
moved the stars and governed the growth of rubber trees,  
that it may have been my face engraved on tombs, doorframes  
and rings,  
my hymns adrift as the sun went down behind Saint Bernard's  
church in upstate winter, Cohoes, New York  
and the kid nearest the door flicked the glaring light on.