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Carolyne Wright

When Eulene walked in, habits
turned the color of strangle-vines.
Nuns scrubbed the chapel
on their knees, the wrathful afternoon
glowering through stained glass,
choirstalls halved by Manichaean shadow.

Now,
Eulene sneaks out during Evening Prayer
to work on her icon of Big Nun—
fishwife in a chain-gang rosary
and goat’s-hair veil, her Popeye forearms
tattoed with the Pontiff’s face.

Eulene hums snatches of the Vatican Rag
and the house gets narrower.

Who else would laugh
at the prioress’s black tabby
with white paws and monsignor collar,
or christen it Magnificat
at the vestry water cooler?
All night it yowls from the dead hemlock
in the convent close, Eulene’s
cr-de-coeur’s semblable.

What is she after?
She’s weary of tinsel stars,
names in neon aureoles
breakdancing on the big marquees.
Through “Religious Preference”
she still draws a line
straight as a brain-scan.
In Sunday School
she learned Sign of the Cross
as Theatre. Later, she wore earplugs
against the sound of one hand clapping,
deprogrammers her parents hired
hot on her trail.

These days,
she answers their calls
in Dracula’s Daughter’s voice:
“Sacre Bleu Convent,
Stigmata Vile You Vait.”

She’s good at shrinking herself
to fit disappointment. When she hears
the prioress’s boots on the stairs
she dumps her crayons in the potted plants,
drops Big Nun into the frame
behind the Founding Mother’s portrait.

She stands up to collect her dogface.
When she looks down, a stranger’s shadow
glides from underneath her shoes.