1996

Cleaning St. Anne

Maureen Seaton

Follow this and additional works at: http://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation

This content is brought to you for free and open access by Iowa Research Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Iowa Review by an authorized administrator of Iowa Research Online. For more information, please contact lib-ir@uiowa.edu.
Maureen Seaton

Cleaning St. Anne

St. Anne holds Mary on her ample impastoed lap, they're both grown but Anne's got knees the size of ham bones and Mary's light as a conscience.

They say da Vinci painted with his fingertips, dragged the paint across the surface, blending one tone into another, precious pigment into sealer.

Everyone's barefoot and plump, reclining on high rocks somewhere higher than Montana. Jesus is squeezing a lamb. Mary reaches out placidly.

I love St. Anne this way, butch and nurturing. How will her restorers decide what's actual varnish and what's original pigment? That's the question.

I moved into St. Anne's parish in 1958. I hadn't been tweaked or ruled yet, no one'd threatened me with sadism or molested my little brother.

Now her head is cracking badly, she needs analysis and restoration, the paint above her eyes thin as mother's milk, her daughter's robes greasy as makeup.

I say: It's the women who keep the church alive. There we are, week after week, filling the pews, handing men the reins. What do we expect?

Still, there is little left between modesty and acrimony, little that the cruciform does not polarize like a magnet in iron filings—you here, you here.
Transcendence comes late, well after seven, that age of reason when you’re finally able, after games of Catechism, to figure out equations for salvation.

Honey, you need a good cleaning. Your face is covered with a dark green veil and your eyes have lost their watery sheen. Mona Lisa’s next, and look at *Ginevra de'Benci*, cross-eyed as the day she was born, now pearly as a baby’s behind. The tints of her face appear not to be colors at all—but living breathing flesh.

**Malleus Maleficarum 3**

Let me tell you what it’s like with a goat, gentlemen, his officious member wagging upward, the spleen in his eyes requiring coma on my part, the thrill flagged before his first bleat. That rogue. He carried me up the stairs to my bed which lay squarely on the floor like any sixties witch’s pad, and took me there in full earshot of every saint I conjured up to ice him instantly before my babies climbed their crib bars and toddled down the hall. That scamp. Who knew cavorting against one’s will could be such an obstacle to grace—that stench-filled dance on his part, turbid gulps