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### Silvertone

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*Providence College*

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## BAPTISM

Lightly scented oil trickled  
off my forehead and into the font,  
lay like a skin on the water.  
For a second, I may have thought

I was asked to drown—though no life yet  
to flash before my eyes—just birth,  
a green room filled with applause.  
After that, one unremitting nap,

both hands tucked in tiny socks,  
my soft nails growing too fast.  
Squinting to see who'd startled  
me awake, I was calmed back to my

Godmother's bottomless rocking.  
I surrendered, wrinkled, red-faced,  
some later said *ugly as a baby hyena*,  
a few spiked threads of hair

the color of beeswax.  
My mother clutched a candle  
as though it were a bowed and twisted  
rose scraped of its thorns.

Handpicked choir voices rolled forward  
crashing over the tops of pews.  
Where could I run, days heavy,  
in my mother-of-pearl baby shoes?

On the 16 mm film, stained glass appeared gray.  
Everyone gathered to see me made pure,  
to keep me from being numbered  
among the beasts.

## PRAYING TO FRA LIPPI'S MISTRESS

*Make them forget there's such a thing as flesh.*

—Robert Browning

### 1.

Opening the triptych panels wide, I kissed faceless

what I thought  
for years was the true Madonna

saying prayers before I pulled back my bedding,  
washed off my make-up.

I watched her disappear over time,  
smear into a red window.

### 2.

In art history books we learned she wasn't sacred after all,

but, rather, Friar Lippi's mistress,  
Lucrezia Buti,

for whom he risked everything—

set against steep cliffs  
and stunted trees,

the glow of her skin  
rising over the banks of angels.

### 3.

I've watched my daughter press her cheek  
against the icon,

slowly trace with her finger  
the large pear-shaped pearl

hung low on the Madonna's shaved,  
perfectly domed forehead.

But if the Madonna wasn't sacred to Fra Lippi, what  
would he have done with us?

Would he have painted the skin  
of my daughter's cheek

as she knelt in prayer, her long brown hair  
cascading down her back?

She places a kiss  
on what's left of Lucrezia's face.

Afterwards, she gently wipes her mark.

4.

There's space left by adoration  
to place one's face.

*This is a woman, this is flesh.*  
We know what's ours to pray for—

all of us, sumptuous vanishing points.

Cloud of breath,  
heavy dew.

## ILLEGIBLE POSTCARDS

*Bone* where we once misread *stone*,  
*fear* rather than *dear*.

*They dragged our neighbor outside*,  
not *We met our new neighbor, shared bread*.

Turn the card over to a golden field,  
grain stalks clearly scripted against the sky.

My family gathers around our own warmed loaf.  
A single white candle pierces the middle,

drips long wax lace onto the small wheat hill.  
Was that tiny ink blot *not*, before *shot*—

Grandmother's feather-shaped eyes  
sweeping through foreign woods

for her missing son? Dreams flowed loose,  
tore on brambly banks.

In my father's handwriting, words spatter  
*rain steadily kicked us*

on the back of a hand-painted  
postcard where a skinny,

knock-kneed boy  
clutches a wind-thrashed umbrella

in one hand, tilts to the weight  
of a water pail in the other.

Fleeing, was this all  
my mother and father had time to write

or standing here  
all we could bear to read?:

*We were carried.  
This morning*

*among flowers  
we were married.*

## SIZE ZERO

Holding bread crust up to my lips,  
I watch a crow hop past its black, feathered anchor  
into *just a bit of atmosphere*.

My cat lunges into a rhododendron bush,

another January mouse pushed out of earth.  
Disemboweled, its whiskered head will be left  
behind like a misplaced chess piece  
or bodiless, a perfect *size zero*.

My dog says it's time to eat again,  
but she'll have to wait before dry food  
hammers dinner into her blue bowl.  
Outside, water thinly pours down the gutter,

drips just barely into a puddle.  
*Size zero*—once, no weight or shape,  
now these pants don't slip as easily  
past my bones anymore.

How *did* I fill with them with zero,  
slim-cut jeans carefully placed on the bed,  
breath held, my body, a bluish flame  
I perpetually gave birth to?

Released at the waist,  
I never knew I could expand  
like a choir, suddenly swelling  
into a hallelujah,

my face glowing bright as a banjo.  
I allow my body a few moments to settle.  
In late morning's first splinters of light,  
I allow it to stay.