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Darknesses

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The confessional is a place where Catholic girls
are brought from an early age, while
communion dresses hang out their wrinkles
from wire hangers on lintels
near four-poster beds,
and angels are visible pane by pane in starry choirs.

The Catholic girl wants dearly to be a saint
or martyr as she's learned in school,
is torn
between telling the priest in the dark confessional
she is one. But with nothing to justify
her being there, receiving the sacraments, purifying,
she tells her sins as she's been taught they are.

Dons the communicant's gown and receives the Lover
dry on the tongue, the Lover in white wool and red,
with a small beard, pictured in her prayer book
saying *Come to me*.

Whether she becomes a woman and does it all again,
pray, dress, sin, confess, love until death do us in,
she is child still, present in embryo
in the Upper Room, Confession's approval
for Apostles: *Forgive, retain as you see fit*.

The glitter of stars in time after Bethlehem's
were under her foot: *terrazzo* floors iridescent with grief,
Vesuvius pouring its black drape overboard.
She was there

caught in her white dress
preserved with her smile
set down in sanctuary
in soot.