kneeling on sharpened floors

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lesson plans, if any actually existed, were aborted
so, too, the discussion of Vesuvius' volcanic ash in 79 A.D.
encrusting Romans like chrysalis mid-thought
as the cold shrill sirens of a tepid war
breached the universal routine
forcing the abandonment of mind-dulling patterns
increasing heart rates in a soldierly dash
to the cloak room for a shroud:
The fabric of protection
smelling of home and the love of our mother

kneeling on sharpened floors
we shared touching intimacy with terrazzo
buffed to an exquisitely fine edge

resembling the pipes of a pressure fed organ
mechanically aligned in scaling rows
we were tuned to the import of prayer
keyed for the unlocking chant
accompanied by a celestial backbeat
clicking and clacking the beads of sorrowful mystery:
the weapons of choice in a children's crusade
against crimson, godless hordes

kneeling on sharpened floors
wandering on inswept eyes
this we prayed:

our Father who art in heaven
hollow be thy name
shall we be found here
by a new millennium's progeny,

sharing in that same archeological wonderment
lately abandoned in gray wainscoted classrooms?

most Pompeian's died
in communion with their families
we died lonely among strangers
orphaned to our God
as we knelt on sharpened floors
at the hour of our death

and i heard the Lord God speak

Christ, where's the light!
and i heard the Lord God speak
to no one in particular:

way to go, my boy,
you found a path
the nuns are as wrong
as the Pope's last decree
there's more than one way
to do this right

I admire the way
you hid in your bed
discovering a world within
s quar ing the darkness
with eyes pinched shut
reducing your vision
to see further ahead
finding it luminous
at the edge of the void
then mapping the liberating light
consider yourself lucky
some children don't get there
they fail, they flail,
they fall beyond the pale
but you, my boy, you found a way
heaven's no more than that

Bob Mulligan

Gender Crunching: Parochial Style

Setting and Prologue: Cathedral of St. Stephen. Good Friday, 1961. The Rosary of the Sorrowful Mysteries has just been completed. All is still except for the dust motes – residents in the liberating light of ancient stained glass windows. The entire grammar school is in attendance. As is the custom, boys are seated in front and the girls are behind them.

Concept for Act I: Daedalus is to Icarus as Japetto is to Pinocchio. Dorothy had no father. We're not talking about mothers here.

Concept for Act II: The priest, male by virtue of his vocation or priest by virtue of his gender? In any case, he was the only (temporarily) effective constraint on any of the shrieking sisters. A crystallizing moment occurred for Judy in grade 3 upon noticing that his he-ness possessed the capacity to shut up her high-ness.

Act II, Scene 3 (dialogue excerpt): Father Gulagus: “Sister Kristina, you must end this now. Submit to my authority and remove those papers from the bulletin board.”

Concept for Act III: A nationally acclaimed feminist, former nun, prolific author, darling of the talk show circuit, and currently a featured seminar speaker, Dr. Judith Josephs, former provincial in the Order of the Hopeful Sisters, will be lecturing at the local community college, three city blocks from her former convent. Her topic: The Channeling of Gender Roles: We Took Very Poor Care of Our Girls!” It is expected that tickets will sell out quickly.

Act III, Scene 5 (dialogue excerpt): Dr. Josephs: “In the final analysis it is a shame, and I emphasize the word “shame,” for what this structure, this church of man-made rules did in a rather conscious way to the