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Altar Boy

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Ryan Vine

Altar Boy

I spent countless hours in rooms
inside of rooms, listening to a man
breathing, absorbing through his
brushed steel screen the holy
anger and loneliness. Forgive me,
Father, for I have sinned.
The last time I was in confession
I lied, and when I left I recited
only half of the Act of Contrition.
For the rest of my penance, I pressed
my forehead to the cold pew in front of me
dreaming of Stacy Parish's hair.
I stared at the cracked, leather kneelers,
the orange sponge hemorrhaging.
I spent so much time worrying
about the Sunday when my turn would come
to kneel at the altar and ring the bells
that when it finally did—when Father Partika
lifted the Eucharist and sang in the spotlight
to the gold dish gleaming in front of his face—
I grabbed the brass handle as I'd been trained
and turned and turned and didn't know why
I could no longer hear him. I hadn't learned
that passing out is really passing through
a beautiful silence before everything goes black.