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Visitation Grade School

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VISITATION GRADE SCHOOL

Patricia Clark

A place I find without a street address, no cross-streets either; instead, I move with a kind of dead reckoning like a walk in sleep or a route known by heart, learned by a child stepping to schoolbells. Some of the streets still without sidewalks,

how rainwater puddles and pools, reflecting sky and one’s own watery face looking down. The woman’s eyes in the office are flecks

of hazel scattered in gray; her eyes squint and narrow: “Here’s a nametag so we can tell who is friend and who is foe.” What I’d give to exchange my past or, at least, to shake this place out of my skin, the smells of chalk and lemon-oiled woodwork;

in the lunchroom, that same reek of thin tomato soup rolling out of dented pots. Upstairs, the priest hands out report cards,

to third-grade kids I think, singling out the slowest boy in class for reprimand. And the nun, first grade, who came

nightly into dreams, her face white and twisted with rage. Here’s rage back for the cruelties, petty meannesses, and all the sins I didn’t do but confessed to, wanting so much to please. Imagining hell now, this would be it—

repeating first grade, Sister Madeleva still in front of the room, teaching without a face or skin or flesh—walking as pure bone.