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Choir Stalls

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Choir Stalls

Julia Rivard Taylor

At evening prayer
panels of ebony wood at my right and left shoulders
direct my undisciplined gaze to the altar.

Two lines of dark-robed monks stream in
to do their work, this liturgy of the hours.

We begin with Psalm 139:
You hem me in, behind and before, no escape.

This massive dark church feels like your hand upon me,
pushing me down,

and my heart is wild and longs to escape,
to run itself lame like a spooked horse across the frozen ground.

Where can I flee from you, the weight of you, Lord,
and the gravity of this life?

Like Peter, I deny it all: children, husband, church,
dirty dishes in the sink, the darkness in my heart.

Yet here in the ancient song, in the clear male voices,
as a white banner of incense rises to the ceiling,
I peer out from my hiding-place in Sheol

and glimpse the cincture around a black robe,
the halter around the stallion's neck,
the braided silver ring around my finger.

Exhausted, I stretch out my hands
and you fasten a belt around me,
and take me where I do not want to go.

Julia Rivard Taylor is a student in Saint John's School of Theology-Seminary's Master of Arts in Pastoral Ministry program and is from St. Paul, Minnesota. She graduated from the University of Minnesota with a Bachelor of Arts in English and works with children and parents in parish faith formation programs.