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Evening Prayer at the Chapel of Holy Wisdom

Natalie Perl Regan

College of Saint Benedict/Saint John's University

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Evening Prayer at the Chapel of Holy Wisdom

Everything for evening prayer is set. Candles are lit, musicians playing, lectors in place, hospitality greeters at the chapel doors. Everything except me. I try on an alb—too big; I am swimming in white folds. I try on another—too small; it pulls at my neck. I feel like Goldilocks in the sacristy. I go for the mid-sized one, which is not just right but it will do. I find a cord to cinch at the waist. I look in the full-length mirror attached to the door, jutting out diagonally from the closet. My alb is pouffy, bunchy, a white potato sack that flows over the tops of my shoes. If it weren't for the lipstick, they might not even notice I am a woman, which, in all actuality, would not be terrible. But I am a woman indeed; it is important for me to do well tonight. It is gift for me to be here, in this giant pillowcase, held together by an oddly knotted cord. I look myself in the eye, at this odd angle, and take a deep breath. What the hell am I doing here, again? It's an odd feeling—out of place, out of character, out, really, of context. Now it is time. I move out of the sacristy to the presider's chair and sit down in the moments before the prayer begins. I concentrate on avoiding the eyes of my sarcastic friend, one of the many seminarians in habit tonight, ever attempting to evoke a face or laugh from me. I look up toward the high ceiling across from me. It is dark outside, a deep, dark blue through the tall and narrow window slats that pierce the high walls of the chapel. And in this darkness, the half moon shines through one of the slats like a pearl, glowing, reminding me of my center. It takes me beyond the mirror and reminds me into whose face I need to be looking this evening. And I know that I am exactly where I am supposed to be.

Natalie Perl Regan