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Poem by Jacqueline Schaalje



Dust to Dusting

Holy water for brook, brown habit
for tree, stained glass for a notepad—
Mr. X, Catholic by upbringing, inhabits a Latin
landscape, imparting wonder like the vernacular
hassock that is my atlas. Wasting days until Dad,
accusing me of putting down roots, chased me away. I pored
over the forests and plains where I knew not
a soul—what kind of person, what sign, brought forth
a snow-capped steeple. I mean, what is nurture?
Meanwhile, 'round the table where a stern brother

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broke bread and gave a stir in the leek soup,
where crows cawed over the wooden Saint Peter,
Mr. X was packed for boarding school.
There, prim brothers taught him, besides a firm grasp
of poetics, sin and sense. And dust, heaps of dust,
he told his orthodox neighbor, who contracted a frown,
his conversion overtures thwarted. "Do you want,"
he said, "to saddle your wife with all that dusting,
vacuuming those mud rivers and clearing up soot banks,
when we all clutter God's heavenly landscape?"

Art Information

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Jacqueline Schaalje has published stories and poetry in the *Massachusetts Review*, *Sky Island Journal*, *Frontier Poetry*, *Sixfold*, *On the Premises*, *Grist*, *arc Israel*, and *Crosswinds*. She was a finalist for the Epiphany Prize and in the New Guard Competition, for her stories. She has been supported by or received scholarships for work on a novel at the Southampton Writers Conference; in the One Story and Live Canon workshops; and joined the 30/30 Project at Tupelo Press. She earned her MA in English from the University of Amsterdam.

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