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Virgin Mary in Kentucky

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Virgin Mary in Kentucky

I'm standing in a K-Mart parking lot feeling just plain dumb.
The lawn chairs march by, trundled across the asphalt by corpulent
men in camouflage. Large breasted women cuddle small lumps
of children who bounce up and down with each determined step.
Closer and closer to Mecca.

They have grown accustomed to slowness. Time moves across
their bodies like a sensual massage. They are prepared to wait
all night. Toys for the baby, the last of the diapers
and a bottle of coke.
This is the place to be.

Old friends gossip on the curbside...Mary's rosary's turning gold.
Sarah saw the priest last week about Mitchell. Not everyone sees
her here, you know. Dick didn't see her last year. A pack of boys
terrorize the girl in the shiny shoes and frilly socks.
A festival of light.

The sidewalk is narrow but the march has begun. To step out of line
now would be costly. The sidewalk empties into another lot.
The crowd spills into the open space, splashing in the mud,
dancing over puddles. Statuesque in the frenzy of this celebration.
A fine mist presses down.

Closer to the prophesied time, 11:53 PM. Excitement is passed
like a lit stick of dynamite crackling and sputtering
its way to explosion. Choruses of Ave Maria, swelling and thrusting
the collective group to watchful anticipation.
Her time has come.

Flashes of light, and I feel nothing. Gasps. A small child, he could have passed for Jesus
in a Sunday School learner, whispers, Where is
she? Is she here? Momma heaves him up for a closer look
and the pop of lights from cameras illuminates his cherub face.
Has he seen her?

Is it possible that in the tangled branches of the tree,
against the backdrop of stained glass windows and symbols of faith,
he has been fulfilled? The throng empties in a slow and solemn march,
retracing the narrow path to the K-Mart parking lot.
Faithful disciples.

I watch long enough to see the last camera bulb flash, final confessions
pass among friends. I look again at the picture in front of me,
tree branches still and the quiet light filtering from the painted windows.
I turn for home, glancing back, hoping
She will appear.

Amy Ard '96