

Maureen Seaton

CLEANING ST. ANNE

St. Anne holds Mary on her ample impastoed lap,
they're both grown but Anne's got knees
the size of ham bones and Mary's light as a conscience.

They say da Vinci painted with his fingertips,
dragged the paint across the surface, blending one tone
into another, precious pigment into sealer.

Everyone's barefoot and plump, reclining
on high rocks somewhere higher than Montana.
Jesus is squeezing a lamb. Mary reaches out placidly.

I love St. Anne this way, butch and nurturing.
How will her restorers decide what's actual varnish
and what's original pigment? That's the question.

I moved into St. Anne's parish in 1958.
I hadn't been tweaked or rulered yet, no one'd
threatened me with sadism or molested my little brother.

Now her head is cracking badly, she needs
analysis and restoration, the paint above her eyes thin
as mother's milk, her daughter's robes greasy as makeup.

I say: It's the women who keep the church alive.
There we are, week after week, filling the pews,
handing men the reins. What do we expect?

Still, there is little left between modesty and acrimony,
little that the cruciform does not polarize
like a magnet in iron filings—you here, you here.

Transcendence comes late, well after seven, that
age of reason when you're finally able, after games
of Catechism, to figure out equations for salvation.

Honey, you need a good cleaning. Your face
is covered with a dark green veil and your eyes
have lost their watery sheen. Mona Lisa's next, and look

at *Ginevra de'Benci*, cross-eyed as the day she was born,
now pearly as a baby's behind. The tints of her face
appear not to be colors at all—but living breathing flesh.

MALLEUS MALEFICARUM 3

Let me tell you what it's like with a goat,
gentlemen, his officious member wagging

upward, the spleen in his eyes requiring
coma on my part, the thrill flagged before

his first bleat. That rogue. He carried me
up the stairs to my bed which lay squarely

on the floor like any sixties witch's pad,
and took me there in full earshot of every

saint I conjured up to ice him instantly
before my babies climbed their crib bars

and toddled down the hall. That scamp. Who
knew cavorting against one's will

could be such an obstacle to grace—that
stench-filled dance on his part, turbid gulps