



On Earth As It Is

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Acts of Reparation to the Virgin Mary

Brian Oliu

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prayer as story, story as prayer

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image by melanie rae thon

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Our Lady of Guadalupe

Of course it would be to you—you, dark-haired, you, an image of you on the forearm of a girl that I loved for a second or three, some time between the nights by the ice counting rotations and the time the girl called me from the house of a woman she met while jailed. She would talk to higher men in exchange for a sheet to pull over her arms, over her shoulders for a few nights. Of course we did not count the rotations. Of course she ignored you on her arm despite my constant touching of the raised skin on nights during those seconds or three, despite you making the most sense out of all of this: about a woman, about nothing mystical, about nothing mythical.

Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal

She could be named after you—of you, child of you, but it is uncertain, maybe bitter. A mountain, maybe. Maybe a beloved lake, maybe beloved, maybe a sea. I know her as this: rotating, graces lit up like electric candles in the windows. A coin in the palm of my hand, a piece of chocolate in the fridge, white socks, hair curlers. We laugh as she misuses words: typhoid instead of typhoon, incinerating over insinuating. A bracelet around her wrist with charms: a typewriter, a woman looking into a mirror, a pair of shoes with a birthday inscribed. You, you are there too, rotating as she shakes her arm, settling among my mother and her sisters and brothers. The woman who saw you posed in the oval could have been her: she could have misremembered the shape of your eyes, the slope of your nose. This woman who could have been her did not age: they are the ones approved—they are the ones charmed.

Our Lady of Fatima

Remember: the girls with the white eyes and the sticky hands might be visited in the fields—the thirteenth day on the calendar circled in pen,

the pen they hold up to me now, asking me to take it, pressing their dirty fingers to mine, as if I grabbed it, it would be mine, as if I could hold onto you, write with you, as if I would look down and know the secret of the secret, that there would be promises made, that we were born like this: that we are worthy of belief, that there is a garden here that cannot be broken, that we are incorrupt.

Our Lady of Lourdes

To the left, a room that held the water heater. To the right, you, not yet asleep. I would keep my windows open in hopes that I would not be sweating when I woke up, that my clothes would not be sticking to my body before even setting foot outside into the rain. Some nights I would hear you talking in Spanish—rhythms unknown. I thought I knew the word for water, I knew the word for rose, I knew the word for my own name: it would get stuck in the cadence. You told me that your name was your name was your name—Maria del Maria, Mar del Mar, the sea of the sea, the you of you. To the right, you, naked, under water. To the left, me, naked, under groundwater—no salt from eyes, no salt to make us float. I would tell you that I have never seen you so beautiful before, but I cannot see things I have never seen.

Our Lady of La Salette

Keep this secret. I will call things yellow that are not yellow: a cloak, a rose. My mother, she paints the walls with my father not around: first white, then yellow. She is a beautiful lady. I do not know if she is you or if she is another person. When the city soiled by all kinds of crimes perishes—twice fifty years from now—we will think the house is older than it is: that the inside of the rooms shrink with each coat, that the walls are closing in. My mother, I do not know who she prays to—to you, to those with you, to those also with you. She cries, always, after songs of last days, the rising up.

Our Lady of Montserrat

Our pillar, our lady. The woman that is carried by angels carried me: round faces into round shoulders. It was not until I was able to carry what I thought were angels that I learned that her name was your name—halved by swords held tight by the ocean: all for the sake of syllables. Back home, among the jagged mountains, they would never cut her name and piece it together—they would never try to move the letters, never try to lop off diacritics like an April rose from the vine. They would build around her name: when she would meet my grandfather while singing the songs of the Escolania, she would add it to yours: the name of my grandfather, the name of the father, my name. This, here, is where we would lay down our sword. This, here, is where she would pick me up, my face smudged with dirt from the garden.

Our Lady of Sorrows

Out of seven, you were the eighth. In the memory of my father, you were the first apparition: a suit, a sadness, a gravestone no longer than the length of a sword. Here is the mother of sorrows. Here stands the mother. Here is pity—here is a note across her sash—you were here, you made this. You were the one we lost. You are the one we ask for by name.

Brian Oliu (<http://www.brianoliu.com>) is originally from New Jersey and currently lives in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. His work has been published/is forthcoming in *Hotel Amerika*, *WebConjunctions*, *Sonora Review*, *New Ohio Review*, *Ninth Letter*, *Brevity*, and others.

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