

KIRUN KAPUR

## **He Who Does Not Have The Church As His Mother Does Not Have God As His Father**

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My mother was the sort of daughter  
who knew the doctor's number;  
whether the spoons were polished;

which hand-cut glasses, sparkling  
in her mother's dark china cabinet  
hid vodka or gin. She knew

the exact number of steps  
between her bed and the landing,  
the landing and the front door;

whether there was milk or ice or aspirin;  
when to spend two nights with neighbors,  
quietly washing their dishes. She read

to be certain when Lily of The Valley  
would bloom, under downstairs windows,  
near her father, entombed in his chair.

A crucifix swung from her bedroom wall,  
the sober Mary hung in the hall, patiently  
steadying her baby. My mother

buttoned her own coat to the chin,  
repeated *The Lord's Prayer*,  
so she wouldn't waste time

on talk about the handsome French dentist,  
his poor child and that Irish wife.  
When she found four children

alone in the woods, she knew  
exactly what to do: she towed them home  
and washed them in her mother's perfumed oil.