

KIRUN KAPUR

## **At the Convent of San Marco, Looking at Fra Angelico's Annunciation (or If Your Mother's Name Is Also Mary)**

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Into the fresco's sunlit room, the word  
falls, a stone that she can't move. She knows

the tomb is sealed and sees the end illuminated.  
Her miracle takes seconds. Shocked

to find the day resumed, she stumbles with the news—  
she will live. I'm studying

the light, the faint cracks in the paint,  
the mother, handmaid, wife:

the moment she is nailed to it.  
My mother was born in broad day,

roof of her mouth un-fused and christened, Mary.  
Father O'Grady held the babe, urged surgery:

*Without the ability to properly confess her sins,  
the mouth of Hell awaits her. I wait*

for Mary to speak in the convent's cell,  
walls scrubbed white—the Angel's perfect face

already turning away—wondering if a soul hangs  
on what can be spoken clearly. My mother was one

of many: Mary Therese, Mary Margaret,  
Mary Benedicta, Mary Genevieve, Mary

of the cleft palate and the ether mask,  
who must be careful not to whistle when she speaks,

Mary, painted as though it happened right  
where I stand, under a monk's peaked doorway,

that she bent half over her book and spoke.  
I'll tell you this, in the worst minute

of my life, I didn't recognize my feet or hands,  
too bright, too hard to breathe, but I could hear

a voice instructing me: *Put on your shoes.*  
*Put on your shoes and stand.*