

For all the Mary Catholics

Mary Catherine came to public school because of money,
sat down next to me; Mary Elizabeth stood behind us
on the line in gym, whispering I ought to join
the Brownies; Mary Frances shared a geography book
(there never were enough in Miss King's room);
sweet Mary Jean showed me a shortcut home,
dangerous, down the alley (now she drives high
school girls across state lines, skipping
parental consent); Maria Teresa showed me
newborn puppies in a basket, then cut me cold
when I would not sing Jesus in December;
cute Mary Alice had a crush on my brother,
sighing they never could marry; famous Mary Jane
with her shiny black shoes traded me St. Francis
for a gas station pinup; Mary Rose shared
my locker, my Kotex, my Kleenex; Mary Ellen kissed
me on the mouth and laughed; shy Mary Jo
worshipped Audrey Hepburn in the dark; quiet
Mary Ann died at the Shut-Eye Motel,
blood from her uterus crusted on her thighs; tough
Mary Margaret moved to Detroit, seven children,
eight years, never answered letters; funny
Mary Louise called her Dungannon brogue
a French accent; Maria Francesca prays outside
the clinic where I work; Mary Patricia (now M. Pat)
called me after thirteen years to ask, Is the pill
safer now? then got divorced and married my brother;
Mary Helen marched with me all the way
down State Street, holding Mary Magdalene
over our heads; and angry Mary Carol goes to Mass
for the music, the poetry, the rush of spirit,
crying in pure nostalgia: *They can't keep me out!*