

LEN ROBERTS

LEARNING THE ANGELS

We sat so patient in that third-grade
class
learning their names, forming the letters
of cherubim and seraphim,
working our way through the Nine Orders of Light
until we reached archangel
and angel, closest to God, drawing the scalloped
wings in dazzling rings,
knowing we would never be more than virtues
or dominions
because we chewed gum and chased dogs,
because Satan, the Black Angel of Endless Night,
owned at least half of us, and we lowered
our heads when Sister Maria asked
if anyone knew where they lived,
Al Aubon whispering from the back
that he saw them rising in flames above the dump,
making us laugh, making Sister warn us again
that the angels hovered
on our either side, that they heard what Al said,
and he would be punished.
I looked to my left and saw Ann Harden
pulling up her white sock, the shiny black patent
leather shoe
gleaming with a silver buckle, and to my right,
Richie Freeman wadding
another spitball to roll in glue and flick
to the ceiling above Sister's desk,
all of us waiting for one to fall as unexpected
as God's Wrath