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Have Mercy

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Have Mercy

by John Van Rys

A quiet place
to work—that's all
I was looking for, finding it
in the chapel basement—
strange place for a stranger.

You intruded, trespassed
my privacy
before clicking it shut—
the prayer room door.

o bother
said the Pooh in me, the stuffy
belly dense with self-
fluff, puffed and expansive.
The dense self is stillness
where atoms vibrate least, settled.

O Lord, have mercy on me
not whispered nor whined nor chanted
with heart absent—all there you sang,
repeated, your voice an offering,
clean flesh on a scorching fire.

O Lord, have mercy on me
your voice was human
in each cord—not lark-like
nor operatic, bound by
comparison, just
clear, patient, again
and again

O Lord, have mercy on me
your voice was pain
and pained me dully, eavesdropper
on your faith
on the straining quality
of mercy—mercy
I neither seek nor give, fixed
in the packed snow
of my dreaming, drowsing,
doped up soul—breath
shallow, barely deeper than my lips.

please open the door
O Lord, have mercy on me.