

If You Can't Imagine Saint Annie

If you can't imagine Saint Annie, imagine a crown of headlights.

Imagine the squeaking wings of pigeons, their strawberry feet.

If you can't imagine Saint Annie, imagine her streets

and side streets, stars smashed into asphalt,

the crooked alley she hauls behind her.

Hear laughter like cracking glass.

Hear the scuffing of the world:

Baltimore, row houses,

telephone poles and railroad tracks,

a wharf where rats bounce like bowling pins.

If you can't imagine Saint Annie, imagine her altar,

a shopping cart. Plastic bags rustle like lungs, rise from her basket

and sigh, ghosts in a simmering wind.

Her sky is eternal.

She kisses a tin crucifix

and blesses you with her cup. "Change?"

The pennies in your pocket jostle like souls.

Name the petals she drops, follow the sidewalk's zodiac.

If you can't imagine Saint Annie, imagine

her beaten sneakers, laces drooping

like her eyes. She sees you

watching her

pick cigarettes off the sidewalk,
puff them down to blisters, slump on a bus stop bench
sucking her thumb. Her fingers
are yellowed newsprint.

Read the back

of Annie's sad hand, and listen:

psalms and prophecies blaze from her face,
an alphabet of swords, lions, roses.

Twilight melts on her shoulders.

Her moon is an optic nerve.

Visit the park where she sleeps,

her cardboard box, pink polyester blanket,

twigs for her hair, and crickets. Trembling reverent mice.

If you can't imagine Saint Annie, imagine your own mother

rocking in the dark, a bent crucifix around her neck.

The weeping Jesus taps her heart,

swings from a shoestring

between her breasts.