

2016

Harris Ave After Church

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Recommended Citation

Maroste, Mary (2016) "Harris Ave After Church," *The Laureate*: Vol. 15 , Article 8.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol15/iss1/8>

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HARRIS AVE AFTER CHURCH

Mary Maroste

Dear Red Hair,
I saw the fire in your mother's eyes
when you grabbed my hand 3 minutes
after meeting me.
So I twisted my tongue down your throat
until she tasted brown sugar.

Dear Family & Friends,
You do not need to turn on the flash when you photograph me.
Yes, this is my real hair. NO—you cannot touch it.
My grandmother was born here. My mother was born here. I was born here.
If you take off the last two letters, you still can't fuckin say it.

Dear 6'3,
You were supposed to come when the leaves turned brown.
Now the trees are bare and my feet are wet.
I told my family about you at Thanksgiving.
They think I'm a liar.

Dear Freckles,
You kissed me like a stumbling apology.

Dear Ex,
Your mother and *her* can share combs.
She doesn't know what it's like to
Be a fetish.

To whom it may concern,
I have HIV.

Traffic stopped in a storm, mosquito snowflakes sucked smoke from the tired exhaust, on the radio the same song played four times. Shapes started to appear differently, a wooden Jesus danced on the dashboard, model trains in place of footprints. When the clock struck nine, feathers appeared, glued to cracked shoelaces from my grandfather's musty red Converse. He told me one day he would put them on and if not fly, at least hover, or run faster. It never happened, his hair grew to match the shell of a cracked egg, and he showed me dried seahorses he'd been tucking under cushions embroidered with small blue flowers. Everyone begged him to stop building forts out of peach skins he stole from the Salvation Army. Last Sunday I drew wasps among the banks of his rivering veins, and their sting stained his knuckles the color of a day-old lemon. His index finger traced morning prayers into groves of quarters stamped with state parks, I wrote them out with lake mud in my sandbox.

LETTERS I NEVER SENT

Heaven Barlow