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don't think i'm anybody's thursday someone's
saving me for a rainy day*

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And Angels Sang

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Our Lady of Mercy High School

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AND ANGELS SANG

When I learned that Mr. Gordan, who was well over seventy years old, was going to be our babysitter for the afternoon, I leaned my head against the sofa and let my disappointment sink into its padded surface. With an old man, a child of eight had to be a model of obedience. It wasn't what I'd had in mind.

When Mr. Gordan came he lowered himself into the room's largest chair and grunted at me to come over to him. I had been hanging upside-down on the sofa, watching TV so intently my eyes hurt when I blinked them. I half-knelt beside his chair and watched, fascinated, as he produced a leather covered prayerbook. During the next hour, we prayed. He began, intoning in a strong dramatic voice and I repeated after him in a stage whisper. Before he left that afternoon he informed me that he went to Mass every morning at seven o'clock. He stared me straight in the eye, repeated "seven o'clock" and out he walked—the man who was no longer my across-the-street neighbor but a layman high priest, a man who was God's best friend.

I could not hope to aspire to the ranks of a best friend, but I instantly became a saint. I smiled continuously, spreading charity to those who were fortunate enough to cross my path. I raced across the street to open garage doors for neighbors, stopped every woman I met on the street to ask if I could help carry her grocery bags or whatever. I also took to wandering through our postage stamp sized back yard, St. Francis of Assisi style, marveling at the wonders of God's nature. A model of virtue, doing extra chores for my parents, I showered benevolence down upon all. For a few days my mother snapped at me to "cut it out!" but soon she only stared at me a bit longer than usual.

I was floating—I made heaven out of the earth, transformed my brown, scratched work table into an altar and spent half the day on my knees. Pinning a dimestore lace mantilla on my head, Mr. Gordan and I went to church every morning. His car was frighteningly antique, shaking and buzzing as we drove.

I sang each hymn loudly, knelt straight as a board and examined my conscience again and again and again.

One morning, six weeks after the day Mr. Gordan had first taken me on as a disciple, I ran across the street, mantilla flying out behind me, to his porch. I was sent back to my house by him just as quickly. He was not going to Mass this morning, he informed me through the screen door. This performance was repeated the next morning and the morning after that. Mother suggested Mr. Gordan might be ill, might have pressing business, might be involved in any number of things that would keep him from going to church with me. I listened to her comforting voice for five minutes—letting her completely finish her speech before breaking into tears.

When I was told Mr. Gordan was going to babysit for us the next afternoon, I choked down my fear and tried to feel relieved. All my questions would be explained to me. I ran into the house the next afternoon to see him, and he stared at my toothy grin with eyes that held no expression. He then said the following, rapidly and forcefully, to my mother—firstly, I was not to come to his house and bother him about church again. His greatest regret was the time and passion in his life that he had “thrown away” on religion. He was thankful he hadn’t gotten me too involved by the time he had come to his senses. How he wished he were a child like myself and could begin his life again—he would know now what values to place in it.

Both he and mother stared at me apprehensively. Fists seemed to be clenching in my throat and something like a scream was spreading in my chest, but the feelings died quickly and I was strangely calm. Mr. Gordan sat in his preferred chair, I sprawled on the floor to watch TV and mother went out on her errand.

Quiet, not a sound but the television. I watched Mr. Gordan from the corner of my eye for a while and then turned my full attention to the comedy show. My eyes felt glassy watching TV. When I shut them, tears formed under my lids and eased the irritation a bit. There wasn’t much to the show, but I watched it with great intensity for a long time. Mr. Gordan had apparently forgotten I was there. He stared at an angle beyond me. read his newspaper, glanced out the window. I couldn’t catch his eye. Mother told me later we were both asleep when she arrived home.