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The Saints

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Two Poems · *Margaret Atwood*

THE SAINTS

The saints cannot distinguish
between being with other people and being
alone: another good reason for becoming one.

They live in trees and eat air.
Staring past or through us, they see
things which we would call not there.
We on the contrary see them.

They smell of old fur coats
stored for a long time in the attic.
When they move they ripple.
Two of them passed here yesterday,
filled and vacated and filled
by the wind, like drained pillows
blowing across a derelict lot,
their twisted and scorched feet
not touching the ground,
their feathers catching in thistles.
What they touched emptied of colour.

Whether they are dead or not
is a moot point.
Shreds of them litter history,
a hand here, a bone there:
is it suffering or goodness
that makes them holy,
or can anyone tell the difference?

Though they pray, they do not pray
for us. Prayers peel off them
like burned skin healing.
Once they tried to save something,
others or their own souls.
Now they seem to have no use,
like the colours on blind fish.
Nevertheless they are sacred.

They drift through the atmosphere,
their blue eyes sucked dry
by the ordeal of seeing,
exuding gaps in the landscape as water
exudes mist. They blink
and reality shivers.

DOORWAY

I seem to myself to be without power.
To have the power of waiting merely.
Waiting to be told what to say.
But who will tell me?

November is the month of entrance,
month of descent. Which has passed easily,
which has been lenient with me this year.
Nobody's blood on the floor.

My arm lies across this oak desk
in the fading sunlight of four o'clock,
the skin warming, alive still,
the hand unspoken.