

Confession by Proxy

by Jane Olmsted

I arrive early, hands jangling pieces
from another game of Monopoly
I couldn't bear to finish. I pull them out, familiar
as my failings, and line them up on the ledge
on my side of the confessional. Leading the way,
no surprise, the silver Scottie noses into places
he has no business going—

Next, the iron's blunt chin and that starchy frown . . .
Behind the screen, you clear your throat.
Hold on, I say, I think we're getting somewhere—

Look, the sports car has screeched to a halt,
sneering at the little plow when it pulls up
ready to argue, some dirty little secret
about who does the real work
and who spends half a day covering his tracks.

You clear your throat again. It's 10 o'clock in the morning
and I've been moving pieces around for 30 minutes.
Things are heating up as the line of penitents reaches
the outer door, or maybe they're just sight-seers
tapping their hymnals against the backs of pews.
I say, maybe we should talk later, perhaps this evening

when the lilacs have closed and the crickets
begin their leg-rubbing—or do they go at it all day long?
Could we stroll around the cemetery where the old nuns
swing their rosaries, chanting in syllables so low
you'd think it was rocks in the creek tumbling toward the rapids—
I hear it takes one pebble 7 years to make its way from the bridge
at the big clock to the bend outside the window there,

where the red Jesus has lifted his hammer and stands ready
to let it fall into a pile of gold and blue lumber. I always liked
that window best, you know, the one where he's working
with his hands not raising them over the children's heads
or lowering them to someone's feet, where he's looking up
as if someone's just called him to dinner, or he's just
remembered something more urgent he needs to do.