

# The Righteous

Ashley Wilson

**The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.**

– *Proverbs 15:29*

God forbid my little thighs be exposed  
in the presence of all those devout Lutheran men.  
I would pick the dried dribbles of candle wax  
from the pew till my fingers turned raw,  
anything to distract from the drone  
of a sermon not meant for me.  
We perched there, perfect rows  
of deep blue polos and pressed khakis.  
I would have worn a skirt, but my legs  
were too long and skirts too short.

Quiet down, like a lady,  
don't waste your breath.  
You know your voice isn't wanted here.  
Press your tense little shoulders  
against these too-straight pews.  
Get down on your wobbly knees,  
fold your trembling hands  
and close your eyes.  
Thou shalt pray into the blackness to be saved  
by a God who doesn't care to answer.

Come, little children—  
stand in uniform columns.  
File through the chapel.  
Come, dip your fingers  
into the trickling baptismal font.  
Drag the cross on your forehead,  
feel it sink into your skin  
as the holy water makes contact.

If you are good, you will  
take the weight of righteousness.  
on your naked shoulders.

I know the weight of *your* righteousness  
is one I will never bear.