

JOHN BARGOWSKI

All Saints Day

(St. Nicholas School, Jersey City)

Zit-pocked zealots wrapped in burlap
and torn bed sheets that stank
of our fathers' Camel smoke
we paraded our fake martyr blood
and foil halos past Sister that same year
the Commies blew out
Kennedy's brains in Dallas,
our mothers' falls pinned to our heads,
the teased synthetic hair knotted
with twigs, and salted with crumbles
of sycamore bark from the only tree
the city crews left growing on our block,
Tommy Chiccone holding
three stones and a palm frond
for the martyred Stephen,
freckled Donna Quinn clutching
a bouquet of white plastic lilies
for sinless Therese,
the framed portrait of JFK
staring down from the bulletin board
of that fifth grade classroom
just weeks before we watched
Jackie trying to put him back together
over and over again
on the screen of the black-and-white.

Dawn, Long Beach Island

One of them had been caught fooling around
after the fireworks on the Fourth,

so the Philly TV weathergirl and her boyfriend
in the rental above us stomped room

to room sending specks of plaster falling
onto our drowsy, sunburned faces,

forcing us to duck under the sheets and listen
to him scream how much he hated

her lying sister, and she his belt-busting gut,
a deep breath, or two, of silence,

broken by a flurry of gulls ripping
at a back-alley bag of trash

and something glass hitting the wall upstairs
before she threw open the door,

flip-flopped down the flight of steps
and made a break for the red Sentra

parked in the shell drive outside our window,
the 4 cylinder coughing to a start

while her boyfriend hammered on the windshield
and begged her to shut it off,

shell chips spitting at the split cedar shakes
as she jammed the Nissan into gear,

skidded out of the driveway, hung a sharp right,
and floored it for the 72 bridge,

her boyfriend, left barefoot at the end of the drive,
in a smog of burnt clutch and exhaust.