

## **Fumbling Toward the Star**

Beneath the backdoor exit's glowing red,  
my father stood in stiff blue jeans, chewing  
at a hangnail. Front row, my mother aimed  
her broken camera.

I was almost ten.

I wanted to be an angel. Instead,  
I wore the plush head of a Christmas cow  
with two holes cut for eyes so I could see  
across the drafty church's stage to where  
the swaddled Christ-child lay, that rubber doll  
redeemed from someone's toy box and cleaned up  
like everyone inside the sanctuary.

Shepherds came forth from the janitor's closet.  
Down the centre aisle, wise men marched  
in satin capes and paper crowns, fumbling  
toward the tinfoil star nailed above our heads.  
They brought what gifts they could: a velvet pouch  
of something they called myrrh, a jewelry box  
inlaid with gold, the cut-glass bottle of  
an old perfume. The holy couple held  
their pose, and stared into the manger straw.

From the balcony, a squad of angels  
rallied down in bleached-out bed sheets,  
handing out lit candles to everyone they passed,  
including my father. He held the flame away  
as if it were a trick, a stick of dynamite,  
and he, a fool left hanging on in darkness  
like me. Onstage, I waited for my cue,  
for everything to change.

I was almost ten.

I wanted to wear a silver halo,  
a white robe. I wanted to stand inside  
the glow and sing O Holy Night, to strike  
another match in the weary, faithful crowd.  
I wanted to sing my mother a new dress,  
a new life, to bring my father to  
the empty seat beside her, front row  
where she waited.

The piano shimmered out  
its starry notes and angel voices hummed  
their peace to every man. On hands and knees,  
with all the other beasts, I crawled into the light.

**Carla Funk**