POETRY DESK

At the Monastery

Cameron Alexander Lawrence

Spectators of separateness,
we plunder the quiet

lives of men who turn
their hands into rosaries,

gardens wed to prayer.
We walk beneath dogwood's

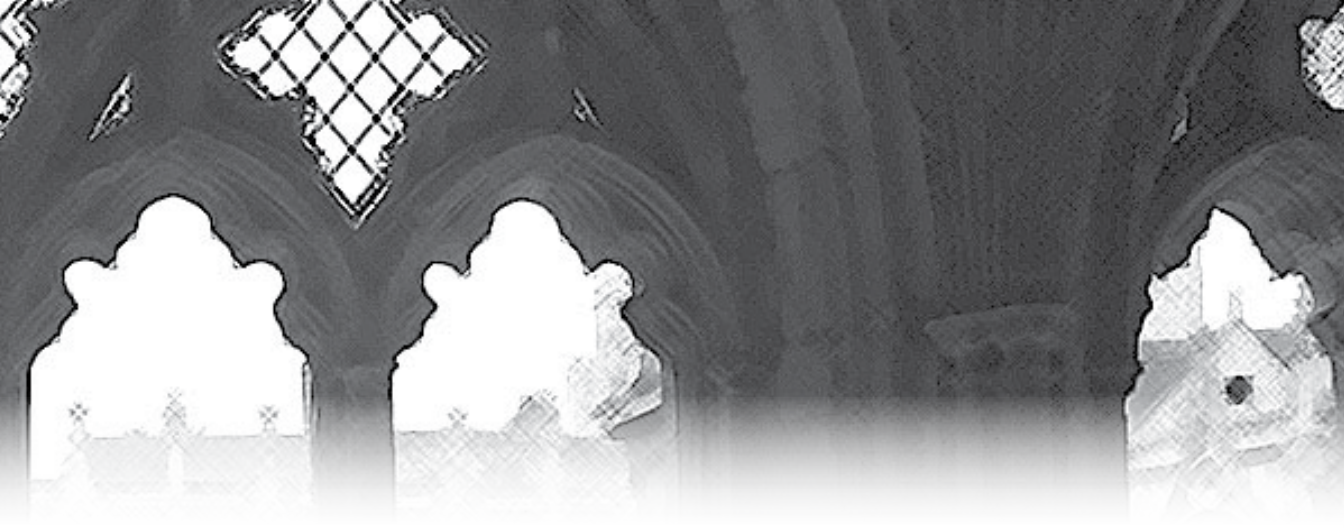
bloomed milk, shins licked
by tongues of purple heart.

And at the basilica door,
push through its heaviness

to find sunlight turned blue,
poured into panes of storied glass,

the empty choir stalls each
a potent suggestion of singing.

No sound but a mother praying
beside her daughter, praying,



Santa María, Madre de Dios—
the beads they handle bright

against the oak railing,
ruega por nosotros pecadores—

I listen, quieting the city
in my mind—*ahora y en la hora*

de nuestra muerte—listening
until the surprise of feet

shuffling down the center aisle,
a monk in gray cassock, feathered

white hair, with eyes locked
on the eyes of the crucified.

I watch him stop to bow,
small as a handful of ash

beneath that hollowed body,
the stone of his head

resting on the cold ground—
an offering to the silence,

to whom the people come
hungry as little children,

running home
for some warmth to eat.

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