



Frances Angela Philip Street



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Philip Street

asylum
the darkness
of mother's hair

patsy

they didn't like me playing with patsy o'malley they said her family were thieves
and rogues we made a go-cart it had no brakes patsy sat at the front holding a
rope to steer it i hugged her waist my knees drawn up her hair in my mouth as
we raced the bus down bridgeman street

summer holidays
the wild flowers that grew
in the kerb

winter morning
the sound of grandma
zipping her boots

hammond street

i coveted the small mirror in my mother's handbag when she wasn't there i would
take it out my breath misting the glass as i held it close

children's home she didn't visit

catechism class the length of her cane

nits she said scratching her head and laughing

small linoed kitchen
my dead grandma's nightdress
on the pulley line

after her death
the undertaker taking liberties
with the rouge

1963

i lived alone with her the winter i was thirteen it froze for five months when the maintenance ran out and there was no more whiskey i would stay in the bedroom stroking her back till she slept

full moon
mother's roll-ups
in a dented tin

18

pub night the dark heap of mother's clothes

a girl

i wanted to be a librarian a saint or an actress at school they told me i could apply
for the mill or if lucky a shop my father bought me a brown nylon overall from
the co-op you could wash and dry it overnight

dark mornings
the smell of paraffin
on my way to work

pay night leaving the mill in stilettos

visiting my sister
her rosary beads
in the room i use

once a mill town only mother there now

hometown
a request for my whereabouts
on the church noticeboard

lingering incense
the priest asks
if he knows me

wild hyacinth
mother's will
in the post

her eyes less blue childhood doll

demolished mill it all grows back

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