

Richard Solly

ALL THE CHILDREN

Mary, your name
is blessed on my lips.
Mary, Mother of God,
Mary, Mary Magdelene,
your name,
called across the fields
of Czechoslovakia,
scrubs, irons and cooks
in the homes of foundry
and steel workers.
Mary, maid to my mother's
eight children, you are Martha
of the New Testament,
your hips sway all morning
at the ironing board
while the steam whistles
to nursery rhymes you hum.
I fold handkerchiefs
into clouds for you,
the towels are capes
that let me fly,
the clothes basket
a wicker boat
you help me row.
Mary, you are Merlin
teaching wooden spoons
to clap and dance in bowls,
teaching dough to dream
of cinnamon and sugar,
teaching my fingers obedience
as I tie your apron's bow
or the babushka
under your chin.

Solly

Mary, I am always a boy
in your lap, laying my head
on your breasts
where the hooves of a horse
trot in your chest
and I fall asleep
in a meadow. Mary,
Angel of Mercy
to my dying sister Louise,
Moth of Light and Scrubber
of Floors,
A Marmalade Queen,
Mermaid in the sea
of our family
I carry your name
in my blood. Milkovich,
I call your name
when I am drowning
in a wave of fever.
You are the warm tea,
the white sheet tucked
under the sick boy
inhaling your breath
until there is nothing
left of you.
All the children in Ohio
you feed and nurture
become young men and women
who lift your casket.
It is your name, Mary,
Mary Milkovich,
no one calls
to iron anymore.