

# December 20, 2016

by Michelle Bitting

I learned a lot from the free museum lecture on the Reformation, how it wasn't really Holy or Roman or an Empire at all when I step back and let the big picture blur. That night at the trattoria, a stranger with thinning gray wisps and shadow for shave declared himself sober thirty years for all the restaurant to hear. He spat mouthfuls of red liquid into an urn, blood-colored murk from goblets that were lined up like spent soldiers around his manic face at the tasting table.

I could feel the unspoken wars, swirling and tense in his high-priced tannins. That night, he gave me a bad painting he'd made. My patience for unbidden gifts with conditions grows weary with age: little indulgences, hidden fundraisers, the politicians buying their way to the top, heaven a gilded locker room under the moon's yellow eye, glowing wide. Even Martin Luther had a change of heart for the darker when he began to lack followers. In the beginning, God fed the rules to the horizon, his dogs crying in constellation, and I've been staring up at the sky, amazed, ever since like I do at the fine-cut stars flashing me from pawn shop windows as I pass stumbling towards home on the darkest day of the year.