

Catholic Colloquies

by [Sarah Gordon](#) in the [October 2022](#) issue

1

I invite Simone Weil to dinner

and though she has a big heart,
she has little appetite. I've set
the bread and wine before her
and bowed my head as though
in prayer. She's bent, but unbowed,
and stares into me through those
scary little round glasses, and I'm
exposed, defensive as a bird
in the crosshairs. Her bobbed
hair, pale face remind me
of someone I once knew, before
the war, someone who toiled
in the auto plant, someone who
really didn't belong there. That
girl was awkward, intense, finally
ill. Had to be taken away. Not
a worker, maybe a student.
Always in black, an angular figure
flinging off her cape, stepping
up to the assembly line as if
she were one of us. Now, she sits
before me. Something about her
eyes, hard but kind, summons
me to a strange extravagance,
to the fulfilling final gesture,
for a moment reminding me
of something I wish I had.

2

I'm serving up soup with Dorothy Day

Honest to God, I've nothing to say,
as I stand by her reproachful, skinny
frame. We all know the resolve
in that square jaw. Her hands
are busy, see, strands of her hair refuse
to stay put, sliding out of that unkempt bun.
She serves bowl after bowl, efficient, cool
in her shapeless shirtwaist, washed nearly
to death. I hear she's some kind of saint,
someone who knows well what she's about—
after her long, lonely coming of age,
the birth of a child, the marches, the fasts,
the Berrigan boys—but I find her thorny,
almost cross. This woman's a warrior.
To the unbroken line of the poor and hungry,
she's matter-of-fact, magnanimously discreet,
charmless, not harmless: a white-hot wire.

3

I joke with Flannery O'Connor about the Trinity

as we cross the field to the fence.
Two's company, three's a crowd,
I crow. Triangle? Equilateral?
And the Holy Spirit? Is that like
putting a Bounce sheet in the dryer
capturing all the electricity?

She's wearing that wide-brimmed
straw hat, frayed, keeping her face
safe from the sun. Saving face,
I think wickedly. Still, she's

patient with my foolishness.

I hear myself gracelessly posing
my questions, saying something
one way and then another, as though
trying on a glove of one size, then
reaching for something looser, with
more give, as she bumps along on
the aluminum crutches, likely savoring
our distance from the house. I want
to say Watch the ditch, May I help,
but my words are trapped in my fear
for her, my fear of her damned
sufficiency, complete, entire.