

Shelter

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Years later, shivering with ague, Martin Luther
recalled lightning, his leaking boots, rain-soaked
cloak, sodden cuffs, dripping hair, cheeks,
dripping eyelashes. Thrown
from his horse, he'd prayed
to St. Anne, mother
of the mother of Christ, protector
from storms and patron of miners. Let me live,
he'd vowed, and I will devote
myself to prayer, sacrifice, a monk's
monastic cell.

One boyhood afternoon, after Martin completed
his sums, his father
revealed a small rock he'd brought
from the shaft, veins of copper
winding through its gray heft, shining threads
too knotted to untangle. The boy had struggled
for a word to describe
the comfort a stone's weight
offered his palm. Martin feared
a boulder would crush his father's leg or a spike
put out his eye, but his father
assured him of St. Anne's favor.

Then he grew in age and wisdom.
Then he put away his childish thoughts, a story
of a woman found
nowhere in the Bible, a legend
powerless to protect his father
or any man. He prayed
to Christ alone, believed
in faith alone.

But might there have been one
frigid morning, his knees aching, his heart
pinched as if by tongs, when he prayed
to a centuries-dead woman,
pleading for her assurance, his mortal flesh
spared from this day's raging storm?