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VOTIVE CANDLES
—*for Denise*

by Nick Carbo

I tell my mother my girlfriend is a good catholic girl—
every Wednesday, she lights electric votive candles
in Our Lady of Guadalupe Church on 14th Street. She prays

that I don't leave her, that no one mugs me on the way home,
that the electricity used to light the candles
doesn't waste energy and increase our country's dependence

on foreign oil. She has pictures of the Virgin Mary on the wall
in the hallway to her studio. Below these pictures is a rack
of plastic, brass, and pewter jewelry. She says that the Virgin
protects

her, that her apartment was robbed twelve times and they never
stole
her earrings, bracelets, and necklaces. She writes about her desire
for catholic school girls to become Popes or Presidents. She hopes

someday a woman will run the Vatican, will legalize all forms
of contraception and be the first to take a pro-choice stance
against male-dominated governments. My mother asks me if my
girlfriend

has ever been to confession. I tell her that she has had
the first and a few others, but what really matters
is that she writes confessional poetry.

that the whole world can be the judge of her sins,
mortal or venial. My mother says she'll pray for us, light
two real candles in the chapel for the Perpetual Help of Jesus.