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Prison

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Prison

It could be an ivory tower.
Don't they call us ladies,
serve us breakfast in bed?
But these Girl Scout uniforms
we wear, and the toilets
without seats, so tasteless.
Nights, all the things we
never knew we loved
getting even with us: the ladies
searching magazines for pictures
of their children, pillows,
pearl toilet seats, houses
they've lived in, cartons
of whole milk, men they've lived
without, things like that;
then there's me knotting sheets
in my dreams, lowering myself
hand under hand, never surprised
when I land that I've landed here;
and last night, Theresa,
whom we never call Terry,
who can no longer remember the name
of the man that she murdered,
sticking her arm in my face,
demanding I slit her wrist,
so tasteless; and there was her wrist
and the razor in my hand and me
saying, honey, if it was anybody else,
and cutting into her wrist
like it was the neck of a chicken,
because she was that stupid;
because if I hadn't been born
with full lips and red hair
I would have been a nun;
because if we have to be evil
we might as well be great at it, that's all.

—*Joe-Anne McLaughlin*