

# *Sketch*

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## Aunt Evangeline

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## Aunt Evangeline

"One person in every family is barren," I tell you. I rub lanolin on my cracked nipples. I still can't stop lactating. Since the miscarriage, thumb-sized circles of milk stain my blouse each time a bird shrieks outside.

"Babies," my mother told me when I was eight, "come from crow's eggs, laid on a tree stump, hatched out by the sun." When I turned thirteen, when I showed her that I was bleeding, she slapped my face. On the Vigil of Saint Andrew, she took me to the Vieux Carre in New Orleans, gave me to Great-Aunt Evangeline. Before my mother left, she pressed her wedding band into my palm so hard that it left a red ringprint in my skin. "Give it to me," Aunt Evangeline whispered, her lips near my cheek. She held me from behind, and I made my hand flat, let her snatch the ring. She pulled me to her table, set me on a metal bridge chair, stacked wood in the fireplace. Ashes blackened her callused feet. She lit the tinder with the flint, and flames sparked off her yellow teeth. She passed me an empty white dish, placed two brass candlesticks on the table. Out of the folds of her apron, two red candles appeared with her left hand. "Light those candles, hold your hand over this bowl, be still." She poured hot wax through the wedding band, through the space between my trembling fingers,

into the dish. "If the design cast  
is human," she said, "you will  
have children." She turned the dish,  
tried to make the wax spread,  
but it dried too quickly. "I can't  
tell." she said. She left me  
at the table, tilting my head,  
squinting, trying to make a baby  
appear. From the clump of wax,  
three skinny red fingers stretched  
for the edge of the dish.

-Karen Piconi