

Third baptism

by [Rachel Brownson](#) in the [December 26, 2012](#) issue

Uncovered in his isolette,  
patches taped over his eyes, the baby  
lies hot and quaking in the light as  
my hand hesitates over the chalky shell,  
the room sounding its clicks and soft alarms.

*Ex opere operato*, the sacrament draws  
its holiness from the work done, not  
the purity of the practitioner, but  
every pettiness, every scalding word  
and deliberate ignorance crowds  
behind my eyes, in the crevices between  
wrist bones, along my ears' creases.

The mother shifts in her wheelchair,  
adjusts her milk-heavy breasts, sighs.  
I wet my fingers, slide them cool  
along the newborn brow, into the soft  
dip of fontanel, and say the words.