

My Boss Tells Me She Prays for Me.

EMMA BOLDEN

She says she holies
her Wednesdays by church basement, prayer-
chaining for me and every Catholic, all sinners

unsaved, so her preacher says. Every lunch break she
lays shame to men who cleave unto men, to women
who hold other women's hands and so can't be held

righteous in the right hand of a God whose world,
have mercy, Gomorrahs more each day. I am stone-
struck. This is Alabama, where *at will* means *of my will*

and not yours, means *honey I hold the power*, means every working
moment my boss soaks a sponge in vinegar. And how
long can I get by with a little help from the sin

of omitting my life's omissions—no white lace, no
gingham, no baby's back to burp or husband's back
to shave, no diamond ring singing its sweet hymn

of safety. Inside me, the words clatter like coins
I cannot risk. I know: my real shame is my silence.
Still. When her pink slip slips my way, I'm surprised

by my surprise, its betrayal of the fact that I believed
there could be a God who blessed us both free.

