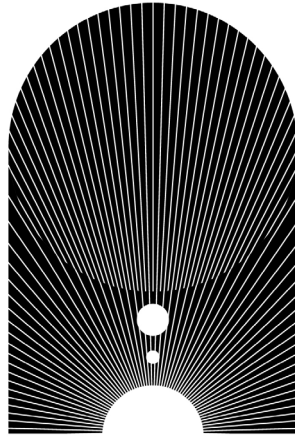


SOLUM JOURNAL
SUMMER 2022



SOLUM JOURNAL

SUMMER 2022

AN IMPRINT OF SOLUM LITERARY PRESS

Solum Journal is an online literary journal released quarterly with an annual print issue. It is a project of Solum Literary Press, a Christian small press publishing poetry, fiction, essays, homilies, and visual art.

MASTHEAD

Riley Bounds, Publisher and Editor in Chief

Douglas J. Lindquist, Content Editor

Matthew J. Andrews, Poetry Editor

Ryan Rickrode, Fiction Editor

Hannah Thigpen, Graphic Designer

SOLUM LITERARY PRESS

2055 E Hampton Ave, 235

Mesa, AZ 85204

(480) 371-9053

info@solumpress.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without the prior written permission of Solum Press editorial staff, except in the case of quotations in critical reviews or other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, email the publisher at info@solumpress.com with “Attention: Permission Request” in the subject line.

For submission guidelines, purchasing, and subscription information, please visit <https://www.solumpress.com>.

CONTENTS

Call to Prayer

Martin Willitts, Jr.	2
Discovering What Is Inside.....	2

Poetry

Alicia Viguier-Espert.....	4
Remembering the Monastery.....	4
Caroline Liberatore.....	6
Dawn After a Summer Storm.....	6
Zach Czaia	7
inishbofin	7
Emily Neuharth.....	10
Soak	10
Kristina Erny.....	12
Horeb, Mountain of the Lord.....	12
What the Trees Teach Us.....	14
Louie Land.....	15
Too Tired For Anger, I Have Become Obsessed.....	15
Jessica Walters	18
The Transfiguration.....	18
Birdie Marie Rodriguez	19
Rosehaven.....	19
Grace Changes Us and Change is Painful	23

Fiction

John Van Rys	27
The Homely Dreams of a Silly Soul	27
Tyler James Russell	69
Some Future Berry	69
David Forrest	77
Bad Prophet	77
Thomas Allbaugh	80
A Table Story	80

Homilies

Paul J. Pastor	84
The Narrow Door	84

Visual Art

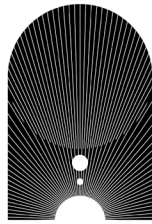
Edward Lee	93
A Dream Reshapes	93
Inertia	94
Broken Blessings	95
The Path to Reach	96
Waterfall	97
Lawrence Rowswell	99
Oriana Stevens	102
Of Wonders You Shall Behold	102
The Time Between	103

Would You Like Mustard With Your Salmon?.....	104
Midsummer Mercies	105

To the Solum team, for keeping the dream alive.

They must have known
afterward that theirs would be
a ridiculous and mulish faith
taking place in between the arousals
of good bread and wine, and a God
who was felt most now that he was gone.

- Robert Cording, "In Between"



CALL TO PRAYER

MARTIN WILLITTS, JR.

Discovering What Is Inside

If the small part of creation is in everything —
moisture, air, fire, cloud, silence —
then do not fear the unknown.

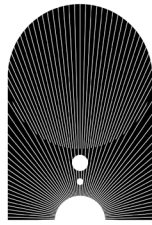
We never know what will compose in our heart —
allowing the moment to transfix, take our hand,
walk into the silence to discover what is inside.

The universe has detours.
The landscape of the mind is a vast universe.
Follow the aimless searching music,
it's meandering river.

The Creator is the river, the otter and salmon in the river,
the dragonfly scrawling on the surface,
the stones feeling the water rubbing them.

We are less than a drop of water
in the grand universe,
but even one drop contains creation.

Martin Willitts, Jr., is an editor for the Comstock Review. He has won numerous poetry awards. He has 21 full-length collections including the Blue Light Award 2019, *The Temporary World*. His recent books are *Harvest Time* (Deerbrook Editions, 2021), *All Wars Are the Same War* (FutureCycle Press, 2022). His forthcoming books are *Not Only the Extraordinary are Exiting the Dream World* (Flowstone Press, 2022) and *Ethereal Flowers* (Shanti Press, 2023).



POETRY

ALICIA VIGUER-ESPERT

Remembering the Monastery

Between the damaged roof and the walnut tree slightly to the right, I watched Venus appear using a celestial method long discovered by astronomers who registered astral details as we, scribes, illuminated manuscripts in the dim light of the scriptorium.

Those days were sacred, when a robin sitting on the window sill to preen its tail caught the brothers' attention and they lifted their heads from smooth parchment, interrupted grinding lapis for a minute to smile at birds' ease to reach heaven.

Today the empty monastery stands silent, stone walls crumbled, beehives destroyed, all bees dying in clusters from pesticides, its orchard burned years ago, the pigsty covered with ivy, only a single walnut tree stands by the wooden door cracked by sun,

which, like me, was once new and strong. In those clear mornings nothing was futile, the bundles we carried were not burdens but a fair exchange for the gifts received, silence, blue skies, tolling bells falling like rain in May when it was most needed.

The roads leading to that door were infinite
and no wind blowing over the hills stopped
a pilgrim seeking the solace of an inner
contact with Andromeda, Cassiopeia, or
their own soul, from getting their reward.
In another life, eons ago, I must have been

one of those monks waiting for the Beloved,
leaning on the walnut tree, closed eyes focused
on the heart chakra counting each breath,
which like heartbeats, connected to my soul.
I remember an eagle resting on that same tree
tried to tell me a secret, but I didn't listen.

Born and raised in Valencia, Spain, **Alicia Viguier-Espert** travelled the world, learned English as an adult and on her first writing attempt, (2017) was the winner of the San Gabriel Valley Poetry Festival Book with her chapbook *To Hold a Hummingbird*. In 2021, Four Feather Press published her chapbook *Out of the Blue Womb of the Sea*. She writes about relationships to nature, identity, language, home, and soul. Her work has been published in national and international journals, anthologies, and magazines. She was selected as one of the “Top 39 L.A. Poets of 2017,” one of “Ten Poets to Watch on 2018,” in the “Special Edition” by Spectrum Publications, and “Editor’s Choice” by Panoply in 2022. Alicia is a 2019 and 2020 Pushcart nominee.

CAROLINE LIBERATORE

Dawn After a Summer Storm

The morning hums yellow after the romp
of the night's thunderstorms, treetops heaving
to catch their breath.

The morning hums yellow, and my soul
is weathered by yet another static sight
indeterminate.

The morning hums yellow. It's sickening
how the sun so pathetically insists upon
itself.

The morning hums yellow, and I turn over
to slumber, rumbling with hunger
for a clearer dawn.

Caroline Liberatore is a poet and librarian from Cleveland, Ohio. Her poetry has appeared in a variety of publications, including *Ekstasis*, *Agape Review*, and *Amethyst Review*. Caroline recently joined staff at *LogoSophia Magazine*, where she is a regular contributor. Much of her current work might be described as taut between transcendent utterances of the gospel and everyday grit. You can read more at carolinelib.wordpress.com.

ZACH CZAIA

inishbofin

once i walked through the ruins
of an old english castle.

it was an island off the coast
of ireland. we picked our way

among the old steps and cells
of this place, and when we were

done exploring, stripped down to
our tighty whities and swam

through the bay, back to shore.
on the beach of inishbofin

a classmate, a young woman
was reading a book as the sun

rose higher in the sky
on our pale almost naked bodies

and she yelped and we yelped
and said, 'we're sorry! we're sorry!'

it was easy to do then, easy
to forget everyone but ourselves.

it was holy week on inishbofin
and the irish priest who organized our stay

drafted us college boys into helping
with the masses. we lit the candles,

we held his robes while he raised the host.
we rang the bell when it became the lord.

who was i then? who am i now?
i remember after easter vigil, smoking

some cheap cigar and sucking down guinness
at a roadside bar. i toasted pope

john paul two with the little Italian
i knew—*viva il papa!*—i said

and at another table, an irishman
told me to shut it. and i didnt know

about what the pope knew and didn't know
about children and priests and secrets

but i could see pain on that irishman's face
as he looked and asked for my quiet and i knew

for the first time that weekend that
faith was harder than ringing a bell

or holding up a robe. and also
more interesting than the bell or the robe.

anyway, i did shut it. i drank
my guinness, savoring the bittersweet cold,

the way it iced my very heart on the way down.

Zach Czaia is a poet and high school English teacher working out of Minneapolis, MN. His collection, *Knucklehead*, was published in 2021 with Nodin Press. Follow him at [@czaiazach](#) to learn more about his work as poet and teacher.

EMILY NEUHARTH

Soak

Full moon in dark contrast.

Sitting close, feeling far

The hot tub holds us.

Steam rises, tears drop.

His words float on water:

Leave me wanting.

Something fell tonight.

I need more than him but

Won't the break drown me.

I look up, down:

white sphere against navy.

God help me

Do it. Snow cloaks my shoulders

Burning wet skin I let it

Stay and grow colder.

I still want for him:

Soothe my pain, fill me.

But I'm on my own

Sinking into night.

Won't the grief lift from my arms—

Rise, chlorine incense.

Is that you God
Moon shining down at me blurry,
Ghostly reflection.

Emily Neuharth currently writes from Chicago, one of her many home-places. She is pursuing an MFA at Northwestern University. Her work has appeared at or is forthcoming from *Salon*, *Petrichor*, *DASH*, and elsewhere.

<https://emilyneuharth.wordpress.com/>

Instagram: @emerinn

Twitter: @emilyeeet

KRISTINA ERNY

Horeb, Mountain of the Lord

1 Kings 19, an acrostic and almost contrapuntal

How many times can we pass by?

Open years Elijah into the day before the crows, your own
red creek bottom. Dry-stone fears that you can't hear us.

Elijah wait with your
back to the hurricane. We are

moved to what burns you.

O, get your head out from
under the rock

note small seismic differences in
temperature the hair on your arms standing up
again like it did the last time.

Isn't there always a last time?

Note the way the air stills and the
 ravens become contemplative

what they question.
How they know us.

What the Trees Teach Us

In the middle and all through,
the trees. Old whirring things.

And in the in-between between
their leaves, time, pinched up.

What falls is not forgotten,
only traded for another sun.

Who else spoke the language
of death from life first?

And did anyone see the green thread
trail into the dirt,

then trellis up
as morning glory?

Kristina Erny is a third-culture poet and artist who grew up in South Korea. She holds an MFA from the University of Arizona. Her work has been the recipient of the Tupelo Quarterly Inaugural Poetry Prize and the Ruskin Art Club Poetry Award, and a finalist for the Coniston Prize appearing in *The Los Angeles Review*, *Yemassee*, *Blackbird*, and *Tupelo Quarterly*, among other journals. She lives in Shanghai, China, where she teaches at an international school with her husband and three children.

LOUIE LAND

Too Tired For Anger, I Have Become Obsessed

With the trappings
of what we'll call progress: chutes
splitting sidewalks into high-rises
of concrete and metal and glass
in a motion towards transparency

With the names of particles
I save for poems—*photons*
bear light *gluons* carry force *fermions*
are particles of matter—but whose
function I fail to comprehend
beyond the definition

With fatigue as the privilege
of those who have given up the fight
or had it kicked from them

With sublimation

With the smell of sulfur

With an interview with Jim Hall
saying *I feel like Miles*
could play silence better
than some guys could play
notes

With transmissions beamed forty-three
million miles between Earth
and *Curiosity*, the twenty-minute absence
before the rover's response

With bottling our sun in green glass—
what my grandmother calls *Depression*
ware—and pawning jade lanterns
for a dollar and a quarter to anyone
who asks for a light

With who owns the water particles
crystalizing from our breath
after they leave our vision to be
inhaled by another

With how energy that spins
atoms into suns marks lovers
as shadowed phantoms on brick

With gestures towards leaving:
the lacing of boots, the clearing
of throats

With the light pollution that backscatters
across the atmosphere
into translucence, cities burning, obscuring
nebulae

With the rusted shopping cart
covered in a blue tarp down
the street, how it seems, in the rain,
a man in a slicker of sapphires
bending across a stroller
to brush his daughter's soaked hair

Louie Land is a poet, novelist, and modern jazz musician living in central Pennsylvania. He holds an MFA in creative writing from the University of Idaho. His poems have previously appeared in *Heron Tree*, *Martin Lake Journal*, *Poetica Review*, *FRiGG*, and elsewhere. His pop-rock album, *Afterglow*, was released in 2018.

JESSICA WALTERS

The Transfiguration

Sure, it was a ridiculous idea—house
the divine in tents, build a dwelling
to enshrine the moment, watch
the prophets glow.

Like Peter, I capture
glory in jam jars,
canning it in boiling water
to preserve it for next year.

But there are ancient rules
against hoarding, and my collection
of last year's glory moulders
before I taste it—light turns to dust

Jessica Walters has an MFA in Creative Writing from Seattle Pacific University. Her work has been published in *Ormsby Review*, *[spaces] literary journal*, *Still*, *Agape Review*, *Scintilla* and her short story “Glass Jars” was shortlisted for the Mitchell Prize for Faith and Writing.

BIRDIE MARIE RODRIGUEZ

Rosehaven

by a rosebush, smocked
 dress tiny blue flowers
 & lace & puffed sleeves

the back of the photo
 Little Bird at Rosehaven 1989
 first thing is Aunt Iris

next thing is flowers
 the greenhouse
 biscuits with jam

early spring ruby throated
 hummingbirds flitted long
 bouts by the feeders

metallic green whirring
 like blades of a helicopter
 Rosehaven was a rest stop

on the Atlantic Flyway
 cardinals chickadee
 finch bluebird sparrow

a glass of sweet tea
 & birdsong & Aunt Iris
 a needle between teeth

dangling up and down
as she spoke craving
Swedish marigold linen

draped over crinoline
hands arthritic knees
the velvet river hung

above the fireplace
she soaked in its spring
fed paint waded in &

golden trees the apricot
fox gawked from river
banks *there she goes*

swimming in velvet
humbled by death
of the fiancé so young

of the man who never
left his war behind
so he painted

mountains like the ancient
promise of a wedding vow
with a forest that pulsed

& a river that opened veins
& a fox that had found
what it was he sought

until one day he found
it too & in a drawl with soft
r's she told us he'd painted

heaven, though
heaven was in her garden
more than the river

or in the sewing room
spiced with potpourri
bowls or in the oven where

biscuits rose buttery
scent consumed childlike
impatience that flanked

an aluminum table
in scrappy limbs
sticky fingers strawberry

preserved cheeks
flushed at the bite
of a longing ignited

for the palm
of Eden &
the greenhouse

a stomping ground
for angels & the wild
elegance of the garden

of Aunt Iris challenged
the need to know & to see
& we were never well

behaved but good & even
as wind grinded the ear-
drum & made plants

to suffer, Aunt Iris swam
in his river, knew just what
to say to the trees to the fox

Grace Changes Us and Change is Painful

“All human nature vigorously resists grace because grace changes us and the change is painful.” —Flannery O’Connor

you forget who
you are in
the attic
as you recover
a poppy
pressed in a wrinkle
in time

the blush stained
paper approaches
as a reflection
of yet another
bygone self
and you face
your brevity,
shake its hand
and say hello

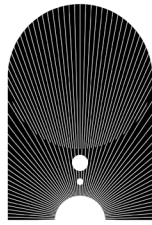
you’ve been many
a thing
perched on the hem
of a dusky ocean
within
seasons that soften
into one another
unhurried
and deliberate
as how the colors
bleed in one

breath with
the turning
of a kaleidoscope

your faults peel
like sunburnt
skin and
worthy
aspirations fatten
over a dozen
infinities
to unmask
a yearning
for the holy
sting

you dwell
in the fever
of every conversion
on the shore
of a mammoth sea
that is undeterred
by the changing
of the guard
unbothered
by the glorious
ache
in the twang
of all your
goodbyes

Birdie Marie Rodriguez is an accomplished folk artist and an emerging poet. She has a passion for storytelling, and is inspired by history, theology, nature and family. She is an alumna of The American Musical and Dramatic Academy New York City, and currently lives on the Coastal Plains of North Carolina with her husband and three children.



FICTION

JOHN VAN RYS

The Homely Dreams of a Silly Soul

It was a mid-November Saturday afternoon, and Evan was out in the cold and windy pasture repairing the fence with his youngest sons Max and Arthur. The charger was showing a short in the strand of electric wire, so he had no choice but to shut the horses in the paddock and determine the cause. The last thing he needed was to chase horses around the county.

He'd been shoring up this fence for years. It was in rough shape, the strand of electric wire the only thing keeping the horses from trying the grass on the other side, where it was greener, of course. Wooden posts leaned, held up in some places only by the wire fencing and the T-posts in the spaces between. Horses had grazed the field for a couple of decades, so the pasture itself was in bad shape, the ground pockmarked by hooves having sunk into the soil. Weeds flourished among the grasses. The field was seriously in need of resuscitation. He could hardly walk across the ground without tripping or twisting an ankle.

Normally, he would have checked the fence in the summer, once a month or so. He and the boys would trim down the tall grass growing up into the fence, prop up sagging sections with metal T-posts, replace broken plastic insulators, and cut back any shrubs or tree branches growing into the wire. At least once in the summer he'd call the farmer who supplied him with hay and hire him to mow the pasture in an effort to keep the weeds under control.

This year, he hadn't gotten to any of this work until now, possibly because of all that had happened—what Evan thought of as a perfect storm. He'd said this aloud twice—once to his daughter Lizzie, who'd been married to Tomás a little more than three months now, and a second time to his son Alex, whose wife Selene ran off with the keyboard player from the wedding band after Lizzie's reception. Other than that, Evan had kept this perfect-storm thought to himself.

He found the break at the far side of the field where the neighbour's scrubland grew up into the fence. Max and Arthur helped Evan bridge the break by pulling the two ends of wire together while he clamped them with the stretcher. He then spliced the break with a short piece of wire and crimped several metal sleeves to hold the pieces together. After all these years, the electric wire was dotted along its length with more than a dozen of these repairs.

The boys helped him load the equipment into the wheelbarrow, and he started pushing it through the tall grass into the west wind, checking the fence line for more breaks, sags, and leaning posts. The barrow was heavy with the post driver and wire stretcher, a bucket containing a hammer and nails and plastic insulators, fencing pliers and the crimper, the clippers for branches. On top he balanced three six-foot T-posts. He was hoping these would be all he needed. Max and Arthur volunteered to run up to the barn and turn the fence back on. "Don't," he yelled after them, "until I give you the signal." He felt abandoned. They couldn't get out of the cold fast enough.

Yes, he thought as he continued walking the fence line, it's been a perfect storm. He hit the mound of an ant colony and the wheelbarrow tipped, depositing its contents in the dry grass. The wind ran through it like a mocking whisper.

As he picked up the tools and searched the ground for nails, he went over what had contributed to this perfect storm. His dad's death and funeral in June, his mower ride to Port Dover in July, Lizzie's wedding on the farm in August, Selene's runner the same night and Alex's heart-break in the weeks after. Up and down, up and down all through the summer and fall.

If it had just been all that, that would have been enough. But behind it all was a creeping fear. Evan had turned fifty-five the past spring, and it hit him hard. One decade, just ten short years, and he'd be retirement age. He'd always been somewhat shy and retiring, but this was the real deal, like a cliff-edge he saw on the horizon with empty air beyond it. He wasn't ready for it at all, and he'd been fighting back the panic.

He and Mae used to joke about their retirement plan. They'd sell the farm and then spend three months with each of their kids, just moving on from one to the next, season after season. They'd buy a trike with a little trailer behind it carrying all their worldly possessions and hit the road, showing up on their kids' doorsteps like hobos badly needing a meal and a shower. When he and Mae joked about it with the kids, the kids joked right back. "I'll pay you to take my three months," one said. "There's not enough money in the world," another replied. Nobody wanted the aged parents, especially for the winter months when they'd be cooped up together in close quarters. "You can just stick us in a shed," Evan would chime in, "we won't be any bother." Mae might reply, "Speak for yourself. I expect to be taken care of in style."

Now, that retirement plan didn't seem so funny. Financially, Evan was worried he hadn't done enough. He was an accountant, for God's sake, so he should have. But there'd been the kids spread out in age about twenty years apart, so he and Mae had spent decades raising them. And, as any parent knew, raising kids wasn't cheap. He still had a wedding-expense hangover. Then there'd been the farm. The old house had been a money pit from the start, all those costly renovations that weren't finished even after all these years, not to mention upkeep. And the animals, he thought, adopting and rescuing and caring for them. Farmers called horses hay burners for a reason.

Money was one worry, but time was another. What in the world would he do without his work? What would he do with all that time on his hands? He supposed he could spend it simply contemplating what the phrase "time on your hands" meant and the mystery of where it came from. Only time would tell. But what would it tell?

His fear was intensified in September when word went around at Wheel and Barrow Chartered Accountants that Barry Dewar had dropped dead of a heart attack on the Trump International Golf Course in West Palm Beach, Florida. Barry was a partner, a bigwig, a mover and shaker, who'd retired just around the time of Evan's birthday. He'd bragged to

Evan he'd paid \$100,000 US to join Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club. At this news Evan had gotten worried he himself was at risk because of his profession. It seemed as if accountants—just like police officers, firefighters, and soldiers—were vulnerable. Once retired, the adrenaline rush of their work done, they went crazy, made fiscally and ethically unsound decisions, and keeled over in short order. Kaput. On a Trump golf course in West Palm Beach, of all places. Evan could see himself hitting a golf ball around his pasture, losing ball after ball, cursing the Scottish who invented this tortuous game—then keeling over onto a horse patty.

Yes, he was deathly afraid of retirement. He saw one of those horse patties ahead in the path of his wheelbarrow. They were hard to avoid, like death itself.

So far, he'd explored in a haphazard way all kinds of retirement schemes that might help him deal with time on his hands, plus generate just enough adrenaline to avoid a retirement-induced heart attack, but he'd settled on nothing. He'd considered setting up a woodworking shop in the barn and doing cabinetry, maybe starting a business building uniquely designed, Evan-original jelly cupboards. Mae could make the jellies and jams and other preserves to fill them. They'd be partners in Erie Jelly Cabinetry, the sign blazoned in huge letters on the barn.

When Lizzie and Tomás made their own wedding wine at the Put-a-Cork-in-It store, Evan looked into becoming a franchisee, setting up equipment in the barn. He'd decided, though, it probably wouldn't fly because most of his neighbours had their own stills. The county market was already flooded with moonshine. Maybe instead he and Mae could turn their old farmhouse into a B&B, call it the Erie Inn or Erie Acres. They could even do that newfangled Airbnb thing, if they could get over their fear of strangers and cure themselves of their reclusive natures.

He'd thought about all the ways they might make their farm into "Totally Green Acres," a model for living green and getting off the grid—a windmill on top of the silo, solar panels on the house and barn, a grove of trees on the front lawn to clean the air and cut down on mowing, a patch

of milkweed to help the Monarch butterflies, wildflowers everywhere else to help save the bees.

The bees led him to think about farm diversification. Aside from taking up apiary to create locally sourced honey, he could enlarge his flock of chickens, maybe add turkeys into the mix and grow vegetables in a large garden. He could open a stand at the local farmers' market. He had a thing for alpacas, so he'd considered building up a herd for their lovely, valuable wool. He could raise Angora Rabbits and Cashmere Goats. *Angora*, *Cashmere*. He loved the luxurious sound of these words.

The fact was Mae loved goats, so they could get a bunch of kids and open a goat therapy clinic, as petting goats had been proven to have a calming effect on people. Perhaps they could go big-time into animal therapy of all kinds—rabbits and goats and horses for mental illness, shock therapy with bats and spiders and snakes for people with phobias. Plenty of these critters on the farm. Maybe they could open a sanctuary for both people and animals. There was always a need for sanctuary in this world. That would keep him busy in retirement. Maybe there would be enough adrenaline if he was part of an underground railroad for people and pets seeking refuge from Trump. Evan had heard rumours of liberal-minded Americans fleeing north.

Of course, the way the world was going, he might not have to worry about retirement. The whole shebang might end first. Climate change was in the news and all around him. Meteorologists were talking about “severe weather events”—more of them happening, getting more and more intense—floods and fires and earthquakes and tsunamis and hurricanes and tornadoes. When Evan was growing up in the '60s and '70s, all the talk was of the Cold War and nuclear annihilation. Climate change felt the same, just a slow-motion version of catastrophe. And it was added on top of that earlier fear, which had returned because of world politics. When Americans elected that egomaniac Trump to the White House, what were they thinking? Evan shook his head. He still couldn't believe it. It felt like the world was going to hell in a handcart. He stopped his own

handcart at a leaning wooden post. He saw it was rotted at ground level, so he'd need to shore it up with a T-post.

As he pounded in the post he thought, and now to top it all off, Mae's left me.

Not permanently, he thought. At least, he hoped not. No, she'd gone to help her mom take care of her dad. It wasn't that far—just in nearby London, the midsized Ontario where so long ago he and Mae had grown up, gotten pregnant, and eloped. Now, her dad Archie had contracted a stubborn pneumonia, and they were worried. He was having trouble fighting it off, his immune system struggling, possibly the aftermath of his battle with throat cancer so many years before, those radiation treatments that saved but damaged him.

Evan had to admit, though, that her leaving was not as simple as the emergency of Archie's pneumonia. A week ago he and Mae were getting ready for bed after a long day of squabbling about Saturday chores, about teenage attitude from Max and Arthur, about Evan's ineffectual parenting style and passive aggressive behaviour, about the state of the house. "I'm sick of you," she'd said. "I'm sick of this house. I'm sick of it all. When the boys are done school, I'm out of here."

"What do you mean?" He often felt clueless about Mae's frustrations. He had tried to brush off the barb as the end of a long day. But he knew that over decades of married life, they were bound to get sick of each other now and then. Sick and tired was the phrase. Was marriage the illness? Was *he* the illness? Was that why she was sick of him? Could it be he was past his best before date, like an overripe cantaloupe—the outer rind gone all soft and pitted, the inside gone mushy sour? Sweet Jesus, he'd thought, it had taken Mae fifteen years to commit to their marriage. What did he expect?

The last half year had been tough on her, too. She was worried about his own health after his dad's death, and worried about his state of mind after he'd run off on his mower to Port Dover. There'd been all the mother-of-the-bride duties for Lizzie's wedding, the intensity and the high of it, followed

by coming back to earth, knowing her daughter had moved on in her life. Then she'd watched her oldest son suffering through marital calamity. And after years of being a volunteer mom at the grade school where all their kids had gone, she'd decided she was through with it, now that Max and Arthur were in high school. She'd almost finished raising her kids, so an empty nest was on her horizon; that was her cliff. He remembered her a number of years ago lying on the couch in the family room day after day, the tears she'd cried, when her only daughter had left home for university. He could only imagine what an empty nest might mean to her. "I'm out of here," she'd said. He could see how she might mean it.

He'd sat on the edge of the bed while she climbed in on her side, back toward him. He looked around at their unfinished bedroom. It was the last big project in their home reno, and it had been unfinished for about fifteen years, completely stalled. His feet sat on a cold plywood subfloor. There was no trim around the windows. The master bathroom was nothing but a framed-off space cluttered with dusty boxes of he didn't know what and old furniture that had no other home.

On one of the unfinished window ledges looking out into the darkness sat Mae's bluebird of happiness, the one he'd gotten her when they eloped. He got up to examine it. The glass bird was dusty and cobwebbed. He picked it up and started rubbing it with the dirty T-shirt he'd tossed on the floor, the shirt that said "My train of thought just derailed. There are no survivors." At that moment, the saying seemed both apt and suggestive of his future. The bluebird was more than dusty. It was grimy. It needed a good scrubbing. He'd do it tomorrow. Why had Mae let it get this way? She used to take such care of the birds he'd bought her over the years—the bluebird, a red cardinal, a hen with chicks, two ivory swans, a wise owl. She used to move them, place them on different perches around the house—window ledges and end tables, book shelves and the top of the jelly cupboard. He couldn't remember when she'd stopped doing that.

"Can you please turn out the light. I want to sleep."

A couple of weeks before this argument, Mae had had a dream in the gray zone between sleeping and waking. After a restless night, she'd woken at about 5:00 a.m. and then entered the territory of strange dreams. When she started out of her upsetting dream, she smacked Evan on the shoulder and called him a bastard. "In my dream, I was leaving you and all you said as I walked down the laneway was 'Good riddance to bad rubbish.' That's what you said to me, and you repeated it for good measure. Your mother was with you and she was smiling and waving."

He'd replied groggily, "It was only a dream. I would never say that if you left."

"If I did, what would you do? Would you even come after me?"

He'd said, "I'd track you down and haul you back home, caveman style. Of course, I'd have to feed the chickens and collect their eggs first. And if you ran away during tax season, you might have to wait a couple of months before I could get to it."

She'd smacked him on the shoulder again, then said "Promise you'd come for me."

"Promise," he'd said, and she'd nestled against him, which was strange. She wasn't one for cuddling. He remembered that moment almost nostalgically as he turned out the light and slid into bed beside her, careful not to invade her half of the bed.

In the morning, the argument had continued as something closer to a debate, not quite a discussion. They were in the kitchen having breakfast while the boys slept on, oblivious. Mae repeated at least part of her complaint. "I'm sick of this place. Nothing's finished." It was true. There was finish work all over the house, practically in every room. "And don't get me started on our bedroom. I mean, it's not that I mind sleeping in it, but it would be nice to actually finish that room. Not to mention it would be damn convenient now to have a toilet upstairs. You know it would."

He knew she was referring to their aging bodies and the challenge of making it to the downstairs bathroom at night. He thought about his own problems with leakage over the past year or so. "I don't know why we

got stalled there. I mean, at first there was the cost, but now I imagine we could find the money somewhere. I blame it all on my PRSD.”

“PRSD? Don’t you mean PTSD? You’re telling me you’ve been traumatized?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes. Not PTSD, though, but PRSD—Post Renovation Stress Disorder.” He’d paused as she rolled her eyes. “All the other renovations we did traumatized me. I’ve been paralyzed for years now, can’t work up the courage to take on one more big project.” He was making light of a serious situation, as he often did, to mask something else. He was really worried deep down there was another reason, one he would barely admit to himself. He didn’t want to finish their room. If he finished it, Mae could make serious noise about putting their house on the market.

As if she’d read his mind, she replied, “We really should finish it. You know it’ll add value to the house when we sell it.” She paused when she saw the look of alarm on his face. “You’re the one who’s worried about retirement. We’re going to have to consider downsizing at some point. This place will be way too big for us when the boys are gone, too much work to keep up in our old age.”

“What, and move to a condominium in the city?” He spat out the word *condominium* as if it was the worst swear word he could imagine. He hated condos, thought of them as giant ant hills, termite mounds. The truth was he loved their house and little hobby farm, despite all its faults. He’d started out hating it so many years ago, loudly so, when it felt like an enemy, but now he loved it. He truly did. Each room felt inhabited, fully lived in. Each window framed a view that brought him comfort and pleasure, whatever the season. Even the bumpy lawn and the ragged pasture—this little bit of Earth’s surface—had worked their way into his bones. “After all the work we’ve put into this place, all the sweat equity, I don’t really want to leave. I want to retire here, nowhere else.”

“I don’t think you’re being realistic. This is a problem you have. And you’re not thinking about what I might want.” He knew Mae was speaking out of a certain restlessness. She often checked out real estate online. When

they went for drives, she would comment on places for sale. How serious was she about not loving their house? She'd said she was sick of the place. What could he do to make her love it, to make her well again? He wasn't sure. She pressed him on the financial angle. "Besides, isn't the point of equity to put it to use in some way?"

It had been in the middle of this debate they'd gotten the call from her mom Doris about Archie. In less than an hour, Mae had packed a couple of bags and headed to the city, to the condo apartment on the Thames River where Archie and Doris had retired years before. Mae'd been gone now a whole week. They talked each day, giving each other updates, but the conversations were short and felt strained, as if they were working hard to be polite to each other under the circumstances.

As he pushed the wheelbarrow along the last section of fence, he saw Max and Arthur up at the barn door, shifting from foot to foot in the cold, hands in their armpits. He yelled at them to plug the fence back in. When they'd done so, they came back to the door and waved. With his teeth he pulled off the work glove on his left hand and placed the bare skin of its back on the wire. A sharp jolt told him the fence was working again. He worried that he and Mae were travelling into a winter of discontent in the wake of this perfect storm.

That night lying alone in bed, Evan had a dream. Perhaps the bed's emptiness brought it on. The past week without Mae had made him realize he'd never really lived on his own. He'd gone straight from his parents' house into a life with Mae, just as she had with him. Neither of them had ever been single. On the plus side, they'd never been truly alone, but was it also the case they'd never experienced total freedom? It was unsettling to think about.

The dream he had was based on childhood visits to his American relatives, his uncle Otto of the big, bristly handlebar mustache and sideburns, his dad's oldest brother, and his aunt Pauline, a gregarious giant of a woman with flaming auburn hair piled on her head, even into her old age. They

lived in an ancient house in the country that was constantly under repair, never finished. Evan remembered a lot of bare studs, cabinets with open walls behind them, pipes and wires running everywhere, creaky stairs up to a second floor with low slanted ceilings. He remembered, though, that his aunt and uncle and their kids—Evan’s six cousins—were all American loud and proud, in a rural Michigan accent.

In the dream Evan’s whole family was visiting them, not just his own family but all his aunts and uncles and cousins, strangely not just on his dad’s side but his mom’s side too, though it didn’t seem strange in the dream. It seemed perfectly natural. Uncle Otto and Aunt Pauline were squabbling about the state of the house. Evan watched in amazement as Aunt Pauline started throwing dishes at Uncle Otto. He caught every one and piled them neatly on the kitchen table. All the aunts and uncles and cousins were laughing and clapping at his trick. “I’m sick of you,” she said. “I’m sick of this place.”

When Aunt Pauline was out of breath and frustrated that she couldn’t get him to drop any dishes, Uncle Otto embraced her in a bear hug, then started kissing her loudly, to Evan’s embarrassment. He was kissing her all over her face and then passionately on her lips, making smacking noises. Evan imagined the feel of that tickly mustache on his lips. Then his aunt was crying and his uncle was soothing her. He turned to Evan and said, “See how sad your Aunt Pauline is? How about you make her feel better? Here’s my tool belt and a propane torch. Why don’t you get started on the plumbing in the master bathroom while your aunt and I have a nap—and maybe then some fun—in the master bedroom.” Uncle Otto wiggled his big bushy eyebrows and twirled the corners of his mustache like a silent movie villain.

Evan wasn’t sure whether it was fear of watching his aunt and uncle have sex or alarm at having to use a dangerous torch that might burn down the house or self-consciousness at having to do plumbing that wouldn’t leak while all his relations were watching, but he woke with a start and a weight on his chest. A glimmer of Sunday morning light was just taking the edge off the darkness of his and Mae’s unfinished master bedroom.

The nightmare was fresh in his mind as he and the boys sat in church later that morning. He'd thought about staying home, given the cold and complaints from Max and Arthur. He'd felt a bit sick in his soul, to be truthful. When he and Mae trained for adoption, they'd undergone personality testing. Evan was told what he already knew, that he was susceptible to the blues, and he felt it that morning. Was there a connection to the bluegrass music he loved, to the angelic voice of Alison Krauss soothing his soul? He didn't know the answer as he sat on the hard pew in the United Church they attended in Windermere, the small town to the east of their hobby farm, wondering why he was there, wondering if anybody went to church anymore. Was he nothing but a religious relic? All he knew was that he'd just felt compelled to drag himself to the service this morning. He'd grown up Dutch Reformed, but had gone liberal when they moved to the farm, tired of theological squabbles. He liked the relaxed attitude of their church. On their sign, the minister put sayings such as "Tweet others as you would like to be tweeted." This morning, though, he thought maybe it would have been better to sit out in the cold pasture like a confused sheep and parlay alone with God.

He followed the liturgy and the hymns on autopilot. Stand. Sing. Sit. Recite. Repent. Pray. Stand. Sing. Sit. He experienced none of the leaks he'd been prone to during the past year or so. No tears. No tightened throat.

He listened to Pastor Julia's sermon unmoved, unreflective. Until she projected on the screen a portrait of a woman in medieval dress, the image almost an icon. The woman held something in her hand. He started hearing the pastor's message. The woman was Julian of Norwich, and what she held in her hand was a hazelnut. God came to her in visions while she was sick, visions called shewings. One of them Pastor Julia called a "ghostly sight of his homely loving." God showed Julian the little hazelnut in her hand and taught her that it contained everything he'd made, that he loved it and cared for it, that it would last forever and none of it be lost. Julian of Norwich. God's homely loving. A hazelnut. The words echoed through Evan's mind and haunted him all the way home to his and Mae's little farm.

At home, he got the boys to make themselves a frozen pizza for lunch and let them make another for supper. In between, he researched on the Internet Julian of Norwich and her hazelnut. She was born around 1342 and died possibly in 1416. That's exactly 600 years ago, he thought. Remarkable. She was six or seven when the Black Death swept through Europe, and she survived it. By the time she became ill and had her visions in 1373, she'd become an anchoress, "one who is retired from the world." The word *retired* reverberated through Evan's head when he read it on the screen. An anchoress or anchorite was someone who'd chosen retirement. Imagine that. No one knew her real name, who she was before she became an anchoress at St. Julian's Church in Norwich, in Norfolk County, England. She took the name of the church's patron saint, St. Julian the Hospitaller. She took a man's name, he thought. He read of St. Julian's killing of his parents, an almost Oedipal tragedy, of Julian's wife convincing him to repent rather than kill himself, to atone by establishing hospitals for the sick. There it was, sickness body and soul. Somewhere Evan had heard this world described as a hospital for sick souls. Was it true?

Evan looked for Norwich on a map of England. He found it in the northeast of the country. How do you pronounce it? he thought. He tried to remember how Pastor Julia said it. Was it Nor-witch, No-rich, or Nor-itch? He studied pictures of St. Julian's Church, of re-creations of Julian's shed, her retreat. He knew that here in Ontario, on the other side of the world, there was a small town named Norwich to the east. There was also a Norfolk County. Was Ontario's own little Norwich in Norfolk County too? The parallels excited him. Might he find a shrine to Julian there, a statue of her holding that perfect hazelnut?

He read about her illness and the shewings she experienced. He'd never been one to think much about mystical visions, but by the time he was done reading he'd ordered *Revelations of Divine Love* for next day delivery. While he waited for it to arrive, he busied himself with reading about hazelnuts. He looked at orchard photos of hazelnut trees, so beautiful row upon row. He studied images of hazelnuts closely—their plump light

brown shells with lighter brown striations. They're ovoid, he suddenly thought, like eggs. Another sign. They fit his ovoid cosmology, the one he'd developed and meditated upon since starting to raise egg-laying hens. Hazelnuts are little eggs, he thought, containing a beautiful brown yolk in the shell. He read about the health benefits of hazelnuts, their ability to ward off dementia. Wouldn't that be handy in retirement, he thought. He read an article explaining how hazelnuts help with bowel movements, weight management, heart health, and sperm count. Wouldn't that be great, he thought, then remembered he'd had a vasectomy. Of course, they might be useful for his sons and son-in-law.

Then it hit him. His favourite chocolate bar was Cadbury Dairy Milk with Hazelnuts. Another sign! He admitted he'd had an affair off and on with Coffee Crisp—it was an addiction—and he'd once had a fling with O Henry because of its orgasmic effects (O! O! O! Henry!), but he'd always come back to Dairy Milk with Hazelnuts. He was married to it for life. Another sign.

He was hit by yet another epiphany. His eyes were hazel, he was sure of it. Sometimes he thought they were blue-gray, other times blue-green, but mostly he was sure they were brown-green. He pushed back his chair and rushed to the bathroom to study his eyes close-up in the mirror. "Hello, Hazel Eyes," he said. "Hi there, Hazel Nut."

Smiling he returned to his laptop and continued searching. He came across news articles about growing hazelnuts in Ontario. Apparently, hazelnut orchards were taking off, supported by researchers from the University of Guelph. They were doing research to the east of his farm, in Simcoe. It had to be legit, then. Another sign. Lizzie and Tomás both went to Guelph. It had a great reputation for its Ag program. He soaked in all the optimistic projections, the testimonies of farmers who'd started their own orchards, the stories of how Ontario hazelnuts would help prevent deforestation elsewhere.

By the time Evan finished surfing and reading and downloading, he was vibrating like a dancing bee. Before heading to bed for a restless sleep,

he phoned work and left a message that he wouldn't be coming in that week, to please clear his schedule. He was taking sick days, or they could count them as mental health days, he didn't care. He'd banked plenty of them over the years. He'd never done anything like this. He was almost giddy with the nerve of it, his restless recklessness.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Monday, November 21, 2016. After Max and Arthur got on the bus the next morning, Evan got busy sending emails and making phone calls. He was making arrangements for the rest of the week, for appointments, trips, and visits. He'd never been this forward before. Was this how bold extroverts walked through their lives?

Just before lunch, *Revelations of Divine Love* was delivered into his hands. He began devouring the story of Julian's sixteen shewings over lunch and well into the afternoon—the passion of Christ, feelings of weal and woe, the wounds Julian asked of God, her vision of God in a Point, the Lord at home in his house giving a banquet, God as a glad giver, God as the Ground in which our souls stand, God as our kindly Father almighty and our kindly Mother all-wisdom. God as Mother, Evan mused, just think of it. The Lord as “sovereign homeliness,” our hearts at home with him. The words *home* and *homely* and *homeliness* echoed through Evan's mind.

He pondered Julian's shewing in which Jesus said to her that in spite of sin “all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.” How could this possibly be? He re-read another shewing in which Jesus said to Julian that in spite of tempests and travails and dis-ease, “thou shalt not be overcome.” Evan knew the storms and trials and illnesses, the dis-ease of life, were real. The promise was harder to hold onto. How could this too possibly be? He read of the two ghostly sicknesses revealed to Julian, “impatience, or sloth” and “despair.” He believed it. He was familiar with these diseases of the soul. He read of the yoking of Love and Dread in this life, and he believed that too. Hadn't such yoking been at the heart of his own story, the story of his life? And

when he was close to the end of Julian's *Revelations*, he read what seemed to sum it up, "Love was our Lord's meaning."

Much of what he read went over his head, but much of it sat in his soul. He turned back to the fifth chapter and re-read it several times—God's homely loving, God the comfortable clothing that wrapped around us, the hazelnut in the palm of Julian's hand as a symbol of all that was made, loved, and cared for by God. How this littleness of what was made pointed to the mystery and largeness of the unmade God, that this God was our Very Rest and our eventual "ghostly rest." How Julian was shown that God finds great pleasure in "a silly soul" coming to him "nakedly and plainly and homely." Evan hoped his soul was silly in this way and gave God pleasure. Perhaps this business of hazelnuts was pure silliness on his part, but so be it.

By the time he finished reading and pondering Julian's shewings, it was late into the night. He felt as if he'd spent his waking hours entering into a beautiful dream. He'd taken pages of notes, started something of a hazelnut journal. He'd found an old binder containing paperwork from his 1996 tax return. Why in the world hadn't he shredded this stuff? He removed the papers, hole punched his journal pages and the printouts he'd generated, and placed them with satisfaction in the binder, snapping the rings closed. He'd barely been aware of Max and Arthur coming home from school. He knew they were confused by his behaviour, by the look in his eyes, but they did his chores when he asked them to, and they headed to bed quietly, without their normal squabbling. What he didn't know was that they'd both called their mom, not just to say hi and ask after Grandpa's health, but to report on their dad's strange behaviour. He'd talked to her briefly, said all was well and all would be well, then hung up to get back to his reading. He dreamed that night of Julian in her sickbed, receiving her dreams in her shed.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Tuesday, November 22, 2016. Today, Evan had his first appointments, these ones at the bank in Windermere. He'd

set up three back to back. First thing in the morning, though, he reviewed yesterday's notes, adding little marginal comments that came to him as he read. He needed to be prepared.

Before he met with his bankers, he needed to have a clear sense of what was what on his hobby farm. He bundled up in his farm clothes and barn boots, took a lawn chair out to the chicken coop, and sat among the hens for an hour. He watched them strut and run and peck and drink. They looked at him with tilted heads and clucked their wisdom at him. He watched several climb into nesting boxes, settle down, and eventually stand to drop a shiny wet egg between their feet. "Why did the chicken cross the road?" he asked them. "Which came first, you or the egg?"

When they didn't answer, he went out to the paddock, taking with him a halter and the bucket of grooming tools. In turn, he groomed each of their three horses. Their winter coats and manes and tails were shining when he was done. He asked each in turn, "Why is the grass always greener on the other side of the fence?" Each one simply whinnied and trotted away when he removed the halter.

Then he wandered the pasture. He started, as he normally did, by walking the fence line, but then he abandoned that to zigzag the field, to walk across land his feet hadn't likely touched for years. He thought of the grasses they'd originally planted—Timothy, Fescue, Rye. He studied the weeds in competition with the grasses—Queen Anne's Lace, Chicory, Goldenrod, and so many he didn't know. All of it was now brown and dry. "What secret are you whispering to me, humble plants?" They continued to keep their own counsel as the November wind shook them.

He returned to the house and circled it before entering, making a mental inventory of the grounds and the outside of the house. Once inside, he moved systematically through the rooms with a clipboard, taking careful notes top to bottom.

He left early for his appointments at the bank. He needed to make a stop first. At the Bulk Barn, he bought fifty pounds of hazelnuts still in the shell. At the checkout, the cashier said, "Boy, you must love hazelnuts."

“I do,” he replied, “I’m nuts about them.”

She groaned and said, “What are you planning to do with all these?”

“I’m not really sure,” he admitted. “Something special for my wife, I hope. They’re part of my retirement planning.”

The cashier looked at him quizzically. “Let me get a box for these. They’ll be easier to carry that way, whatever you decide to do with them.” When they were loaded in the box, he carried them out to the car like treasure and set them on the back seat. Before he entered the bank, he took three nuts out of the box and put them in his pocket.

His first appointment was with Darren, a retirement planner. Darren’s office felt like a small, windowless box. He can’t be thirty years old, Evan thought. After shaking hands, Darren said, “I’m surprised you wanted to meet with me, given you’re an accountant.”

“Everyone needs an objective point of view,” Evan replied to hide some of the insecurities he felt. “It’s kind of like medical professionals,” he continued. “It would be bad practice for them to self-diagnose. They need another doctor to examine them.”

For this initial meeting, Darren discussed the services he offered, explored Evan’s retirement goals, and gave him a set of worksheets to complete so Darren could generate a report with some projections for him. When they were done, Darren rose and extended his hand. Evan pulled a hazelnut out of his pocket and placed it in Darren’s palm. “Here,” Evan said, “Have a hazelnut.”

“Gee, thanks,” Darren replied in a perplexed tone.

Sensing Darren’s confusion, Evan said, “They’re very healthy. I’m thinking of making them an important part of my retirement plan.” He paused, then asked, “Speaking of healthy, in your experience working with couples, what makes for a healthy and happy retirement? I mean, how do they keep it together?”

Darren looked even more perplexed by this question and lowered himself back into his seat. Evan followed his lead. Eventually, Darren replied, “That’s a good one. I hadn’t thought about it much, as the financial angle

is my thing.” After a moment, a light came into his eyes. “Hobbies,” he blurted out. “Lots of hobbies. If they get along really well, then hobbies they do together. If they don’t get along, then separate hobbies. Lots of separate hobbies.” Darren seemed pleased with this insight as he rose to make a second, successful attempt at shaking Evan’s hand. Okay, thought Evan, he and Mae lived on a hobby farm, so they had the hobby thing going for them. Darren led Evan to the next door office and introduced him to Herbert, the bank’s Ag Specialist, a big man with the weathered face and hands of someone who’d spent a lot of time working outdoors.

Herbert’s office was identical to Darren’s in size and appearance, though on the wall he has an aerial photograph of a large farm that looked to Evan like a poultry operation. “Hello, Hello. Welcome, welcome!” Herbert greeted Evan with a firm handshake, offered him a seat and said, “What can I do for you today? Thinking of buying a farm, selling a farm, expanding your operation, leasing more acres, building a new barn, buying more quota, financing more equipment?” Herbert sounded to Evan like an auctioneer.

Evan took another hazelnut out of his pocket and placed it on the desk in front of Herbert. “What do you think of that?” he asked.

Herbert looked even more perplexed than Darren had. “I don’t know. It’s a hazelnut, isn’t it? Tasty, I guess.”

“It’s the future,” Evan said. “Hazelnut orchards. What do you know about them?”

Herbert started laughing. “Oh, hazelnut orchards! Now you’re talking my language. I thought for a minute you were a bit of a nutter. Yeah, they’re definitely up and coming. There’s a lot of interest in the potential—a growing market, solid research going on into varieties for our region.”

“If I wanted to go into hazelnuts, what kind of financial arrangements might the bank offer?”

“What kind of acres are we talking about?”

“Four or five.”

“Four or five thousand?”

“No.”

“Four or five hundred, then?”

“No, just four or five.” Evan could see Herbert’s face fall before he recovered a few seconds later. “We have a little hobby farm,” Evan continued, “about fourteen acres. Ten of it is pasture right now, and I’m thinking about half of that could be hazelnut trees. We don’t need it all for the horses anymore.”

“Well, we don’t normally take on hobby farms. We’re more into the family farming and agri-business end of things, but seeing as you brought me a hazelnut as a gift, let’s see what we can do.”

They talked at length about how Evan could put together a business plan for his orchard to determine costs and benefits, a timeline for moving from the red into the black. Here Evan felt on familiar and comfortable ground, and said so. He came away with more worksheets. As he and Herbert shook hands, he said, “In your experience, what makes farming couples successful? I don’t mean financially. I mean in their marriage.” His main image of such couples was the painting *American Gothic*, which wasn’t terribly inspiring, even a little frightening with that pitchfork. “How do they stick together, happily married, in such a stressful business where it’s up and down with the weather?”

Without hesitation, Herbert said, “Tractors. Lots of time apart on tractors. His and hers tractors, if you can manage it. That’s what my mom and dad do. They’ve never been happier.” He picked up the hazelnut and examined it. “Mind you, it helps that Dad’s deaf as a fence post—you know, from years of machinery noise—and doesn’t hear half of what Mom says.” With that, Herbert ushered Evan out of his office and next door for his appointment with Denise, the personal banking specialist Evan had known for a number of years.

Denise’s office was a carbon copy in size and layout to Darren’s and Herbert’s, though hers seemed at the same time more personal and more cluttered. On her walls hung graduation pictures of her children, a boy and girl set. She also had framed certificates for having completed a number

of courses and workshops. On her desk were stacks of thick manila files, legal sized. She greeted Evan warmly and asked after Mae and the kids. He varnished the truth and filled her in about his dad's death and Lizzie's wedding, careful not to spill too much and have the meeting turn into a therapy session, which it easily could have. She moved smoothly from expressing condolences to congratulations as he shared his family news.

Denise swept her long hair behind her ears, a signal that she was ready to get down to business. "Now, Evan, what can I do for you?"

"Well," he began, "I'm not getting any younger, and neither is our house. I'm thinking it's time to finish renovating the place."

"That sounds good. How long have you been working at it, again?"

"Twenty-five years."

Denise's stunned expression gave way to laughter. "Mae must be a saint. I know I couldn't take the house unfinished that long."

"She may be a saint who's reached the end of her saintly patience," he admitted.

"I see, so you're here for a little marriage counseling."

"That's about right." They talked then about the renovations that needed to be done and how Evan might finance them, whether through drawing upon savings or taking out a loan or refinancing the mortgage or creating a line of credit against the equity they had in the house. They went over various scenarios in detail.

As their meeting was winding down, Denise said, "You're an accountant, so I know you could figure out most of this stuff yourself. Are you really here for another reason?"

After deliberating for a moment, he said, "I see you've got your female intuition working." He hesitated, then added, "Tell me something about equity, Denise. Does equity create equality in life? I mean, it sounds like they come from the same word—equity, equal, equality. Is equity good for relationships, for marriages, for example?"

"I'd have to say yes. Both financial equity and personal equality can be good for a marriage. I didn't have either in my marriage, and look at

me—divorced.” She laughed for a moment, then added. “I’m no scholar, but I think equity is all about fairness, plain and simple.”

“That’s helpful,” he said. He pulled the last hazelnut out of his pocket and showed it to her. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

“Yes, it’s—lovely.” Denise’s tone was quizzical. “What kind of nut is it?”

“A hazelnut, a perfect ovoid hazelnut—like the universe.” He studied it in his hand for a moment before going on. “I want my marriage to be a perfect ovoid, and this nut might be the key. I’m thinking of making Mae a gift of hazelnuts. What do you think? You’re a woman. What do women really want?”

“Well, I’m only one woman, so I can’t speak for all my sisters out there. Giving a woman nuts is a good start, but you might want to take them out of the shell and cover them in chocolate.” She paused before saying, “In some ways, it’s simple but tough. Love, true love, like in *The Princess Bride*. You know, Wesley and Buttercup. That’s the real gift.”

He reached across the desk and passed Denise the hazelnut. “Here,” he said, “as thanks for your help.” Why did he feel guilty giving her the nut, almost as if he was betraying Mae, being unfaithful to her? He remained puzzled by this feeling.

“Happy to help,” she said as she studied the nut in her palm. “Remember, true love and chocolate. They go perfect with nuts.”

With that, Evan had completed his bank appointments. Before heading home, he made a detour to a chocolatier he knew. He carried home his chocolate hazelnuts and worksheets, plus the advice he’d been given. That evening, after feeding the boys and himself more pizza and doing chores, he checked in with Mae. “Yeah, I’ve been taking some sick days,” he said. “Nothing serious, but I think I caught some sort of bug when the boys and I were fixing the fence on Saturday. Or maybe at church on Sunday.”

“You sound fine.”

“It’s really deep down in my chest—a rawness—it comes and it goes. It’s gone right now.”

After he hung up, he worked steadily on the planning sheets he'd gotten from Darren, Herbert, and Denise. It was a way of bringing some order to his tumultuous thoughts, though when he tired of it, when he was seized by doubts, he went back and read Julian's hazelnut shewing. He closed the day by recording his plans' progress in his hazelnut journal while occasionally cracking nuts and munching on them.

When he at last slept, he dreamed that he and Mae were riding bareback and bare naked through their hazelnut orchard. He felt as hairy as the horse he was riding. In the dream, all the dogs they'd had through the years were with them, running in and out of the horse's legs, circling the trees with noses to the ground. One of them was running a circuit of the entire orchard, like a sentry. He knew the dogs were guarding the trees from invading squirrels, which were lined up by the hundreds along the electric fence, mostly black and gray ones, but some rather frightening red ones as well. He and Mae were tree-herds, caring for the trees entrusted to them. He knew these were a special species of hazelnut tree called True Love, yielding plump nuts covered not in a hard shell but a chocolate one. When he woke in the morning, there was a large spot of drool on his pillow and a slick mess in his groin. His dream had turned wet—his first one in many years.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Wednesday, November 23, 2016. This morning's appointments were with the plumber and the electrician. They arrived within minutes of each other, coffee break time, and Evan offered them a cup of Joe, which they were happy to receive if it wasn't too much trouble. Jerry's company had done the electrical rewiring when they'd first moved in more than twenty years ago, plus the work in the barn before Lizzie's wedding. His hair had grayed, but Jerry still had an unruly shock of it standing up on the crown of his head. Frank's plumbing and heating company had done a number of jobs for Evan and Mae over the years, from furnace repair to water heater replacement. Frank was wearing his trademark suspenders. He called them his butt-crack prevention system.

The men had travelled from the basement, where they reviewed the current plumbing and electrical set up, to the main floor, where they debated how best to run the wiring and pipes and ducts upstairs, and finally to the master bathroom, where they were now standing surveying the empty space. Before they'd arrived, Evan had spent the better part of an hour hauling out the boxes and furniture long deposited there. With a piece of chalk, he had then outlined on the wooden floor where he and Mae so many years ago had planned to place the vanity, the toilet, the shower, and the tub. Jerry and Frank were now discussing that floor plan and what it meant for the electrics and plumbing and heating. Evan stood and listened, fingering hazelnuts in his pocket and looking out the window at the pasture, where some light flurries were settling among the grasses.

"I'm glad to see you're finally getting to this project," Jerry said to Evan. "After all this time, I thought you'd given up on it, or worse, you'd given up on us and gotten someone else to do the work." He chuckled, and added, "You said it was urgent. What's the sudden rush?"

Evan replied, "The job can wait a bit, but I'd like the estimate soon." Almost as an afterthought, in a joking tone, he added, "My marriage may depend on it."

Jerry and Frank offered an appreciative chuckle. "I've heard that more than once," Frank said. "When do you need it?"

"Saturday at the latest. Can you manage that? I'd be happy to stop by in the morning and pick it up."

Jerry looked at Frank and said, "Well, since you're in such a pickle I think we can manage it, can't we Frank?"

"Anything to help a brother get out of the doghouse."

"Thanks, guys, I really appreciate it. You might just save my bacon." Evan pulled a couple of hazelnuts out of his pocket. "Here, have a hazelnut. They go great with coffee."

In the afternoon, he dropped off his worksheets at the bank and headed to the Windermere Home Hardware, where he'd gotten most of his home reno and farming supplies for years. At the lumber desk, he ordered

waterproof drywall and cement board for the bathroom, wood trim for the bedroom—all to be delivered on Saturday morning. He picked up drywall tape and mud and sandpaper, though his PRSD momentarily gave him the shakes and he was tempted to flee through the automatic doors. When he'd gotten it under control, he picked up flyers for wood flooring and tiles, brochures on tubs and toilets and vanities and light fixtures.

At home, he spent the rest of the day filling out the section of his binder on the reno projects that still needed to be done. As he cracked and munched on hazelnuts, he created floor plans for the bathroom and work lists for the bedroom. He hole-punched his brochures and inserted them among the other papers. The binder was growing thick. Like it was the Bible and he was in the witness box, he had his left hand resting on it when he called Mae. When he asked how she'd been and how her dad was doing, there was a bit too much vibration in his voice and the pitch was high, as if it was about to crack.

“What’s wrong?” she asked. “You don’t sound right. What’s going on?”

“It’s just my body fighting off this bug. I’ve been feverish all day, with bouts of the chills. Here, I’ll put the phone on speaker so you can talk to the boys.” Max and Arthur looked at him strangely as he deposited the phone on the kitchen counter. “Talk to your mom,” he whispered to them, directing them to the phone with his eyes.

In the evening he watched old home-reno videos on the barely-working VCR that had been among the junk in the master bathroom. He and Mae got these videos when they first moved to the farm. The videos showed couples, real or scripted, doing all the DIY necessary to fix up an old house, to make it homey. Evan was reminding himself what it took.

Before bed, he looked up the word *homely* online. He wanted to know what it had meant 600 years ago to Julian of Norwich. Strange, while here in North America it meant ugly, in England it had meant back then and apparently still meant cozy and comfortable, snug and hospitable, warm and cheerful. In his hazelnut journal, he puzzled over this contradiction

and how it may have come about, adding this reflection to his list of the day's accomplishments.

When he dreamed that night, it was a nightmare, a PRSD aftershock. He was working on the drywall in the bathroom, but he made mistake after mistake. All his cuts were wrong so the drywall didn't fit together. There were huge gaps in some places, overlaps in others. He discovered after putting some up that it was the wrong kind—not waterproof. He had to take it all down, drive to the Home Hardware on his mower, and carry the large sheets back to his house on his little yard trailer. It was impossible to keep the heavy sheets balanced and they kept tipping off. Each time he stopped to balance them again, he saw that the line of traffic he was holding up was getting longer and longer, to the point that the vehicles stretched to the horizon. Drivers were blaring their horns and shaking their fists at him, calling him an Old Fart Driver. OFD! OFD! they screamed. When he was finally back at work, the screws kept punching through the drywall because the walls were warped, not flat. The sheets were pockmarked with holes. When he attempted to mud the holes and the seams, they were bottomless, no matter how much mud he put in. There wasn't enough mud in the world, and he'd forgotten to tape the seams anyways. He tried to plug the holes with hazelnuts, to no avail. When he went to sand the mud, it was literally mud, heavy and wet mud, so going over it made his arms ache. And even though it was so wet, sanding it still made an enormous cloud of dust that filled the room. It was in this smothering cloud of white dust that Evan awoke, heart pounding, to the darkness of his unfinished bedroom and his empty bed.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Thursday, November 24, 2016. Evan stood in the office of Dr. Reginald Millbank, the foremost expert on hazelnut farming in southwestern Ontario. Evan had travelled to the University of Guelph this morning to meet with Dr. Millbank, who had responded to Evan's initial email on Monday that he would have an hour between a class and a meeting. Millbank's office was filled with that particularly

academic version of clutter that Evan remembered so well from his university days decades ago. He still had that feeling of awe and respect for professors, even though Millbank was likely more than a decade younger than he was.

“Please call me Reggie,” he said as he offered Evan a seat across the desk. Dr. Reggie was a surprise to Evan—no tweed jacket here, no ’70s antiestablishment jeans. Instead, Dr. Reggie wore a tight button-up shirt, short-sleeved and bright yellow, with a purple bowtie and gray designer slacks, slim fit. He was heavily muscled, like a body builder, big mustache and little goatee, shaved bald head. His arms, the part of his neck Evan could see, and the back of his head were tattooed with various creatures and plants that blended together in fantastic arabesques. Piercings adorned his ears and eyebrows, lips and nose.

“Thank you for meeting with me on such short notice,” Evan said, and then repeated the purpose of this visit—to learn more about hazelnuts, the trees on which they grew, and the potential for his and Mae’s own little hobby farm.

“I’m happy to help anyone with an interest in hazelnuts,” Dr. Reggie said. “Fire away.” For the next hour, Evan learned from the wisdom of Dr. Reggie about climates and microclimates, soil testing and amendment, the trees’ need for proper drainage and wind protection. Dr. Reggie talked about preparing and planning the site, planting the bare-root stock, mulching and weed control and fertilizing. He waxed poetic about the sex life of hazelnuts, of the union of male catkin and female flower, pollination giving birth to the perfect nut. He spoke passionately about the art of pruning and the joys of harvesting. He talked of his research and the varieties of hazelnut they were developing. From a drawer in his desk he pulled a plastic container filled with hazelnuts in different compartments, each carefully labelled. He gave Evan sample nuts, along with both their Latin and common names. Some were Turkish, others European, still others Northern. Evan felt that he’d entered an exotic, enchanted world, a perfectly ovoid nutty universe.

By the time the hour was nearly up, Evan had received a pile of fact sheets and research papers and popular guides to hazelnut farming. He had rich material and a wealth of wisdom for his binder. Before getting up to leave, he asked, “Why hazelnuts? I can see that you’re passionate about them, so how did you get into them?”

“Ah! It was love at first sight.”

“You mean the first time you saw a hazelnut tree?”

“Well, yes. But no, the first time I saw my husband.”

“Your husband? He’s the one who got you into hazelnuts?”

“In a manner of speaking, yes. About ten years ago I was in Europe doing research into olive trees—that was my first love. Amazing trees, as old as the hills. Out of curiosity, I decided to take a working holiday in Turkey. I’d heard about the hazelnut orchards there and made arrangements to join a tour. My then-future-husband was the guide, and also the orchard manager, as well as a master pruner. I introduced myself after the tour, and we spent hours sitting beneath an ancient Turkish hazelnut tree. He taught me everything he knew about hazelnuts as we fell in love. The rest is history, as they say. I’ve had a passion for hazelnuts ever since.”

“That’s beautiful. So your husband is Turkish?”

“Actually, no. He’s Armenian, but that’s another story—much sadder.”

Evan pulled his copy of *Revelations of Divine Love* out of the knapsack he’d brought with him. He had a small bag of hazelnuts in it as well, meant as a gift for Dr. Reggie, but Evan now felt foolish about it. He’d make do with Julian. “I have a hazelnut story for you, too.” He told Dr. Reggie about Julian of Norwich, of her illness and her shewings, and he read Dr. Reggie the chapter about the hazelnut in her hand and God’s homely love for the world.

“That’s beautiful,” Dr. Reggie said with tears in his eyes. He came around the desk and embraced Evan in a burly hug. Evan could feel the bulge of Dr. Reggie’s biceps against his arms, the press of metal against the skin of his cheek, the breadth of Dr. Reggie’s back in his own arms.

Evan's mind was full as he drove away from Guelph, full of information, full of mystery at people's loves and the lives of trees. On the way, he stopped in Simcoe. Dr. Reggie had called ahead and let one of his grad students know that Evan was coming by. Evan knew lots of technical research was going on here, lots of measuring and testing. But all he wanted was to see and touch a hazelnut tree. And that he did. The grad student guided him out into Dr. Reggie's test plot. In the late November, early afternoon sunlight, the dormant trees were bare but beautiful. They looked fragile and strong at the same time. Springtime potential slept within them. Evan removed his left glove and touched the bark, ran his finger along a branch-tip where in a few months a bud would appear.

Evan got home about an hour before the boys got off the bus. As he reviewed the material he'd received and the notes he'd made, he felt overwhelmed at what was necessary for the birth and growth and maturation of a single hazelnut. But he remembered Julian's shewing. He might feel overwhelmed by this trial, this dis-ease, but he would not be overcome. His silly soul would survive and, he hoped, please God, maybe even please Mae. He wasn't sure who was the tougher nut to crack, God or Mae.

As with *homely*, he wasn't sure what *silly* meant 600 years ago, so he checked. He found an archaic meaning—helpless, especially applied to women, children, and animals. Sounds biased, he thought, kinda male chauvinist, but he liked the definition and the company of those it was applied to. Plus, it was archaic, as he was at fifty-five. But was it what Julian meant? Then he found the late Middle English definition—that would be the right time—*silly* coming from *seely*, meaning happy, worthy of pity or sympathy. That made sense of “silly soul.” But how *silly* came to mean *foolish* remained a mystery to Evan, just as with the story of *homely*.

When he talked to Mae that evening, he said he was feeling a bit better. He might even be on the mend, but he was going to stay home Friday as well, just to be sure. He didn't want to relapse. He said it had been good to stay home, like a trial run for retirement. “I'm feeling homely,” he said, “maybe even a little silly.”

“What are you talking about,” Mae replied. “Homely? Silly? That doesn’t make any sense. You sound like you’re losing it. Should I be worried? You’re not planning another runner, are you?”

He thought about it for a moment. “No. Quite the opposite. Everything’s fine. Remember, all will be well. All manner of thing shall be well.”

“Have you been taking Arthur’s medication?” Arthur had ADHD.

“You know me. I don’t do drugs, never have. I get high enough on life and love.”

“Oh Lord, now I’m definitely worried.”

“I’m just feeling chill today, totally relaxed. I’m going to chillax some more while you talk to the boys. Give your mom and dad my love.”

Before bed, Evan put together a flyer for his next day’s journey. He printed 100 copies. He also printed five pictures of Julian holding the hazelnut and put them in cheap plastic frames he’d picked up from the dollar store. He found a staple gun and some extra staples, along with some paper bowls. He placed these supplies in a box beside his box of hazelnuts. He was ready, armed as a hazelnut apostle.

That night, Evan dreamed of a single hazelnut tree on a vast plain, otherwise empty. The tree was beautiful but bare. He was lying beneath it, alone. He said periodically, “I have a silly soul, don’t you know.” As in time lapse photography, he saw the tree above him bud and leaf and burst with catkins and flowers. But he knew there was a problem. The male catkins were the right ones, but for miles there were no hazelnut trees with flowers the catkins could pollinate. The flowers on the tree were in the same predicament. No viable catkins for miles. No pollination, no hazelnuts. The flowers wilted on this beautiful, silly, solitary tree. Evan heard a voice say, “It’s fruitless. Everything’s fruitless.” He woke from the dream with a hard nut of loneliness inside, like a tumour.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Friday, November 25, 2016. Evan had his two boxes in the back seat, like presents, along with his knapsack. He was travelling the back roads from their hobby farm to Norwich. The cold

November sky was surprisingly sunny as he threaded his way through stubble fields, plowed land, and dormant orchards. He was hopeful he might find some sign of Julian of Norwich in Norwich, Ontario—a plaque, a small statue, an alcove in a church wall. He was hopeful, too, about the greetings he was bringing—his flyers, his pictures, his hazelnuts. Strange as it seemed, he was hopeful too that his journey might shed some light on his troubles at home.

But he was perplexed when he passed a sign welcoming him to Oxford County. How could this be? Norwich was supposed to be in Norfolk County, just as in England. Who would make such a basic mistake?

He was still pondering this confusion and what it might mean for his pilgrimage as he approached the town. At its western edge, just past the sign welcoming him and indicating the town was established in 1810, he was confronted by a smallish billboard. “Repent,” it said, “for the Kingdom of God is at hand.” Below this command, it quoted Isaiah 11:4. “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.” Evan heard the message as aimed at a particular brand of sinner, fornicators and the like. He started to feel uneasy, as if he’d made a big mistake, as if someone knew why he and Mae had eloped.

He decided to park on the main street and wander around the shops, get a sense of the place and see if anyone had heard of Julian. He carried his flyers, the staple gun, a few bowls, and some hazelnuts with him in his knapsack, along with *Revelations of Divine Love*. He stopped at clothing shops and cafes and banks and bakeries and delis. Everywhere, he asked, “Do you know Julian of Norwich?” He got answers such as, “I think there’s a Julian works at the post office. Great guy.” “Is this Julian a missing person? You might check with the OPP down the road there.” “Julian? Kind of a sissy name for a guy, ain’t it? Don’t think we’ve got a Julian here.” “Got a last name? It’d help to know if he’s Amish or Dutch or Canadian.” Each time, he explained who Julian was and passed the citizen of Norwich a hazelnut and one of his flyers, with the bold heading “Do

you know Julian of Norwich?” plus the picture of her holding the hazelnut, information about her, and the hazelnut quotation from her book. “That’s interesting,” some people said. “That’s nice,” others replied. One or two others said, “Sorry, we’re a Protestant town, no RC here.”

Evan wandered a little farther afield through the town. He was losing hope about a statue or a plaque or a sign. He stapled flyers to hydro poles everywhere he went. Ahead he saw the library, right beside the emergency services building. Seems like a good match, he thought—side by side saving souls in Norwich. He first dropped off a flyer and some hazelnuts with the paramedics. As he was leaving, he was sure he heard them debating in an undertone whether he was a nut case, whether they should intervene, but he was gone and into the next door library before they took any action.

He found a quiet spot in the reading alcove to rest and warm up. He pulled out his copy of *Revelations* and read over several passages he’d highlighted, passages that encouraged him to continue in his pilgrimage. He went to a computer and looked for Julian of Norwich or *Revelations of Divine Love* in the library catalogue. Nothing. He wandered the shelves until he found a section that looked as if it was books on religion. He folded a flyer in half, like a book cover, and placed it between two books where he believed Julian’s book would go, then left behind a hazelnut on the shelf to mark the spot. Before leaving, he took out another flyer and wrote on the back, “I recommend that you purchase for your library Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*. I think you’ll like it. Plus, she was from your namesake town in England, so she should be your town’s patron saint. I would support a petition to that effect. BTW, Norwich is supposed to be in Norfolk County, not Oxford. You might consider fixing that mistake. Sincerely, an admirer with a silly soul.” He then folded the flyer and dropped it in the suggestion box on the way out.

He continued wandering and stapling up flyers until he arrived at a children’s park. It was empty. Not surprising, he thought, given it was late November and older kids were in school. The park had been tidied of

all its fallen leaves, the swings put away for the winter, a small fountain drained of water to prevent freezing pipes. The park was bordered, though, by a creek still running but edged at the banks with ice. No Julian plaque, no statue, no sign. But he noticed instead that between the fountain and the creek, among some large oaks still wearing their brown leaves, there was a playful statue of a squirrel family—a sitting adult almost as tall as Evan, plus three children. He laughed at the sight as he walked over to it. The adult squirrel's front paws were holding a large acorn, but its arms were the perfect distance apart to hold one of Evan's paper bowls. He filled it with hazelnuts as an offering, then took handfuls of nuts and scattered them through the park as if he were sowing seeds.

He returned to his car to undertake one last task in his pilgrimage. He wanted to see if any churches in town offered some recognition of Julian. As he drove down the main street heading east, he saw several people stopping to read the flyers he'd stapled up before they moved on, perplexed or pondering in their hearts, he didn't know. He saw a woman pull down a flyer, whether to keep or trash, Evan couldn't tell. He hit the breaks, momentarily confused. From the back, she looked like Mae. It was Mae, he was sure of it, until the woman turned around.

He was still unsettled when at the far east end of town, he found a large Reformed church, plain and modern. It was surrounded by a big parking lot. On either side were retirement units, and behind it the parking lot merged into the lot for a large school that went with the church. From cradle to grave, he thought. The Dutch folks in town and all those Dutch farmers in the surrounding countryside were covered. While the school lot was full today, the church lot was empty. He could choose a spot near the doors.

The doors were locked against him. He knew this kind of Dutch church, very pious and conservative. His mother had grown up in a church like this in Holland, a black-stocking church she called it. They had all their doctrinal ducks in a row, and while Evan grew up learning them, he wasn't sure he gave a quack anymore. They'd call him a backslider, a reprobate,

a lost lamb not worth tracking down, lukewarm water the Lord would spit out of his mouth. He'd be neither a believer nor an unbeliever but a misbeliever. Their doctrines and moral rules were like posts in a palisade, each one backed up by a list of Bible verses, each verse a rifle atop the fortress.

But Evan suddenly realized he was being ungenerous, maybe unfair. What did he know of the hearts that met here each Sunday, of the silly souls they carried within them? For that matter, what did he really know of his own soul—and of Mae's? He leaned a framed portrait of Julian against the locked doors and placed a bowl overflowing with hazelnuts on top of a dozen or so flyers, offered a silent blessing, then left.

Next he came across the Baptist church in town and had a lovely chat with the secretary. He asked her too if she knew Julian of Norwich. "Can't say I do," she replied. "But you might check at the Timmy's. They know everybody in town there." He explained Julian was a medieval woman, and told the secretary of her shewings. The secretary said, "A woman, really? Fancy that! She'd be Catholic, though, right? There's some dangerous mumbo-jumbo, there. Can't be too careful."

He'd thought of asking her if he could hang a picture of Julian in their sanctuary, but thought better of it now. Instead, he said, "Mind if I have a quick look at your worship space before I leave? It's an interest of mine."

"Go right on in. We're always open for business," she said with a laugh.

Inside, he found the baptistry. He leaned Julian's portrait against it and left behind, as before, a bowl of nuts and a stack of flyers. As he exited the church by the front doors, he wondered what the born-again secretary would make of that when she found it.

In another part of town, he came upon the Presbyterian Church. It too was locked up tight, but he found three signs on the back door: "No solicitations," "No junk mail please," and "Out to lunch. Be back soon." As a surprise for the diner's return, he left at the base of the door his offering of Julian's portrait, a bowl of nuts, and flyers. He was certainly not soliciting, and what he was offering was the opposite of junk mail, he was sure of it.

He walked to the United Church, which happened to be across the street. On the digital sign, he read, “God answers knee mail.” Hah, Evan thought, that was more like it. He suddenly realized that puns were part of his religion, if not its central doctrine. The front doors happened to be open. When he entered, he heard voices coming from the basement. He took some stairs circling downward, opened a door, and found himself interrupting a laughter-filled lunch meeting. It was a table full of ministers enjoying each other’s company, what they’d call fellowship.

A minister jumped up and came to him. “Hello, hello, I’m Reverend Natalie, the minister here. What can I do for you?”

“I’m so sorry to interrupt your meal. I’m just visiting town and doing a little research. Maybe you could help me?” The other ministers were listening.

“Yes? What about?”

“Julian of Norwich. Do you know her? I thought because your town is called Norwich, people here would have heard of her.”

Reverend Natalie and several voices around the table shouted out, “Of course, of course! We all know Julian. Love her book!” Reverend Natalie added, “Why don’t you join us for lunch? Hospitality, that’s what Julian’s all about.”

“That’s very gracious of you,” Evan said. “I’m not interrupting church business, am I?”

“Not at all,” she replied. She asked Evan his name and then introduced him to the rest of the ministerial gang—the Presbyterian, Baptist, and Dutch Reformed pastors.

He realized he was famished and at first ate his chicken soup and ham sandwich quietly, listening to the ministers talk about when they’d first read Julian and what her shewings meant. Then they were asking him questions about his interest in Julian and what he was doing in Norwich.

“It all started with the sermon my minister, Pastor Julia, gave last Sunday.”

“I know Julia,” said Reverend Natalie. “We went to seminary together. A lovely soul.”

With that, Evan launched into his story, all of it—the perfect storm of the past months, Mae’s absence, his looming retirement crisis, his discovery of Julian and hazelnuts, his dreams of an orchard in which he and Mae could grow old, his looking for a sign in their little town.

When he was done, the Baptist minister said, “Praise the Lord for silly souls!”

“Amen,” the others replied.

The Presbyterian minister added, “Julian may not get a warm reception from the folks in Norwich, but you were right to try.”

“Amen, brother!”

“The Lord bless you on your pilgrimage,” Pastor Natalie said. “My advice is to be patient. You’ll find your way home, and so will Mae.”

“Amen, sister!”

The Dutch minister brought the discussion to a close, saying, “The Lord works in mysterious ways his wonders to perform.”

“Amen to that!”

Before he left, Evan thanked them for the meal and their company, and explained what he’d left behind at their churches. To Reverend Natalie, he made a similar gift of Julian’s portrait, a bowl of nuts, and some flyers. “Well, bless your heart,” she said as he bundled up to go back into the cold.

He got into his car and decided to make one more circuit of the town, checking his flyers and looking for one last sign, though he felt now that he might not need it. In the north of the town, though, he found it—a monument. Not for Julian, no, but for something perhaps just as meaningful. The monument was built of field stones, with an old tombstone set into the bottom half and a plaque into the top half. It commemorated Black settlement in Norwich in the early 1800s and the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Evan was surprised to learn Norwich had been part of the Underground Railroad, that the village was founded as a Quaker Settlement, which explained the mission to fight

slavery and offer freedom. While that history might be hidden beneath the present surface of the town, he felt it was still there. Times had changed, but this encouraging story of homeliness for silly souls endured as a sign of what was possible.

At the base of the monument, he placed his last portrait of Julian and a bowl of hazelnuts for future pilgrims. On the back of a flyer, he wrote, “You shall not be overcome, despite tempests and travails and dis-ease. See p. 141.” He tucked the flyer into a crack in the tombstone.

With that, Evan drove back the way he came. The blue morning sky had gone overcast, and large wet flakes were beginning to fall like sprinkled sugar on the town. When he approached its western edge, he noticed that on the back side of the fire and brimstone billboard was a quite different message, beginning “For God so loved the world...” That sign’s better going than coming, Evan thought, as he accelerated and left Norwich behind.

On the way home, he stopped at the bank in Windermere to pick up the reports generated by Darren and Herbert, the list of financing options put together by Denise. He visited Jerry’s Electrics and Frank’s Plumbing and Heating to see if their estimates were ready. He was happy to discover they were. It would save him a trip to town the next day.

That night, after a week away from work, Evan was exhausted. Maybe it was proof he wasn’t cut out for retirement. But of course he had spent the day on a pilgrimage. He spent it searching for a sign and sowing seeds, and he had no idea if they would bear any fruit—any nuts to be precise. Aside from jotting down his reflections in his hazelnut journal, he rested.

When he called Mae, she said, “You sound tired. What have you been doing?”

“It’s this time off. It’s very fatiguing,” he replied. “Stressful, even. I need to take some sick days to get over my sick days.”

“What? Are you thinking of staying home next week, too? Now I’m really truly worried.”

“Then come home and nurse me.”

There was a moment of silence before she answered, “I’ve got enough sick males on my hands with my dad.”

“I was just kidding. I’m fine, just sick of being lonely. Whenever you’re ready to come home, I’ll have your nurse’s uniform prepared, so you can practice your healing arts on me.”

“Very funny. You wish.”

“Here are the boys. I think they’re actually getting sick of frozen pizza.”

“You’re supposed to cook it. You do know that, don’t you?”

That night, Evan had a lovely dream. He was on an old-fashioned train travelling through farming country in the middle of the summer. Everywhere the corn was high. He passed a brilliant field of sunflowers and beside it a vast hazelnut orchard with a monument to Julian of Norwich in front of it. The train pulled into Norwich, but it was Norwich in the 1800s. Men and women and children were in simple, old-fashioned dress. He got off and saw that everyone had a copy of *Revelations of Divine Love*. Some people were even reading it and smiling. He heard beautiful gospel music in the distance and walked toward it. He entered the African Methodist Episcopal Church, which was filled to the rafters with song. A young woman saw him and moved over to make room in the pew. She was Black, but he knew in his heart she was also Julian and also Mae. He was carrying within himself all his weal and woe, his love and dread. He brought them into this house of worship to Father almighty and Mother all-wisdom. The woman showed him the hazelnut in her palm and passed it into his. “Welcome home, silly soul,” she spoke into his ear. When he woke, the music echoed through his mind. The notes pushed back against the solitary darkness of his bedroom.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Saturday, November 26. The next day, Evan brought his overflowing binder down to the dining room table. It now contained the bank reports and the renovation estimates. It contained a copy of his flyer, plus an account of his pilgrimage to Norwich. It carried accounts of all the dreams he’d had for the past week, whatever they might mean.

Perhaps most importantly, it contained the results of the research he'd done first thing this morning, even before he had breakfast. Mae loved recipes, so he'd searched all her cookbooks for hazelnut recipes and photocopied them. He'd searched the Web for them too. After all, it was World Wide. He now had a thick section of hazelnut recipes for Mae to read, if not to try out.

He ate breakfast with the binder beside his plate so he could flip through the pages. Before he was done, the delivery truck from Home Hardware pulled up the laneway with his order from earlier in the week. The driver used a hydraulic arm to lower the materials onto the laneway. Evan roused Max and Arthur to help him get all the materials into the mud room, in case of snow or sleet or even rain. It was still fall, after all.

"What's all this stuff for?" Max asked.

"Christmas," Evan replied.

"I hope this isn't my present," Arthur said. "Boring."

The rest of Evan's day was spent writing two documents on which his future depended.

The first was a retirement plan. In it, he explained for Mae his inspiration about hazelnuts, where it came from, how these ovoid miracles were a kernel of what they might do with their retirement. In his plan he outlined the links to the environment, to repairing their pasture and replacing their fencing, to finishing the house renovations and making their master suite into a retirement retreat. He summarized their financing options and projected the financial reward. He provided evidence about the health benefits of hazelnuts and hazelnut farming, both physical and mental. As he polished up his plan, he thought she was certain to find it compelling, it was that good. But then he knew he needed to add a section at the end listing options for retirement that didn't involve hazelnuts, choices that included selling the farm or something even more drastic for the life they'd lived together till now. A life apart.

The second piece was a proposal. Thirty-five years ago, when they'd found out she was pregnant with Alex, Evan had simply said to her, "Let's

elope.” He’d never offered a proper proposal, so he was writing one for their retirement, a set of vows. It was so much shorter than his retirement plan, but he found it so much harder to write. After all, it called for poetry and feeling, for inspiration. He did his best, working on drafts long into the night. He promised to be her anchorite if she would be his anchoress. He promised not to leave her alone by dying, if he could help it. He’d wear sunscreen outside, especially when he was mowing, to prevent burnt skin and Melanoma. As much as he could, he’d shield her from tempests and tribulations and dis-ease—or help her endure them. He provided an enticing list of seductive hazelnut recipes in his proposal, and promised to be her sous-chef in this culinary affair, as well as to bring her chocolate-covered hazelnuts from her favourite chocolatier. He added that he wouldn’t mind receiving a Dairy Milk with Hazelnuts once in a while from her. He vowed that if they were blessed with a girl grandchild, he would convince the baby’s mom and dad to name her Hazel; if they refused, he and Mae would stubbornly call the girl Hazel anyway, as a nickname. He promised to care for Mae just as he would care for their hazelnut orchard—tenderly, lovingly.

When he called Mae that night, he said, “Is your dad well enough for visitors? The boys and I would like to come tomorrow.” He’d almost added, “I’m coming for you,” but refrained in case she said, “Don’t. I’m happy here.”

After a moment of hesitation, she said, “Okay. He’s well enough. When can we expect you?”

That night Evan dreamed he was in a kayak paddling down the Thames River. The water was too shallow in spots, so it was tough going. From the banks giant squirrels watched his struggles, their chittering like laughter. He carried with him a branch. At first he thought it was an olive branch for Mae, but then he realized it was a hazelnut branch, a gift from Dr. Reggie. Evan landed his kayak and began climbing the condo building where Archie and Doris lived, the branch held in his teeth. He knew they lived on the fourth floor, which was high enough, but for some reason he

had to climb to the top—twenty-odd stories. His fear of heights kicked in as he climbed, just as in his old nightmare of falling from a dome. When he was almost at the top, he saw Mae above him on the roof looking over the edge of a rail. He could see branches of trees. He thought there must be a roof-top garden up there. Maybe it was an orchard. She said, “I’m sorry I said I’m sick of you. I didn’t mean it. Well, maybe just a little.” As she let down a rope to him, he called out her name. The hazelnut branch slipped from his mouth and began floating to the ground like a feather. He lost his grip and plummeted after it. He realized that if he grabbed the branch, its magic would save him from hitting the ground. He was about to touch it when he was jarred awake, lying on the floor beside the bed.

Hazelnut Log, Earthdate Sunday, November 27, 2016. It was the first Sunday in Advent, the Sunday of Hope. Evan thought of this as he drove toward London. He wasn’t going to the Advent service this morning in Windermere. No, he was going to get Mae and, if at all possible, bring her home. It was what he’d promised to do after her nightmare. What is this hopefulness? he thought. Why does it feel so close to heartbreak?

As he drove, he realized they’d been separated for two whole weeks, when they’d never been apart for more than a few days in the last thirty-five years. He felt it like an ache, that nut of loneliness inside his chest.

He was listening to Alison Krauss sing. She was going down to the river to pray. That was what he was doing as well, heading down to the Thames River. Max and Arthur were in the back seat, headphones on and listening to their own brand of inspiration. In his trunk, Evan had everything he needed, that he hoped would do the trick.

A large bowl of hazelnuts for Archie and Doris, a bride-price for their daughter.

A box of chocolate-covered hazelnuts for Mae, a Dairy Milk with Hazelnuts for himself.

Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations of Divine Love*.

His retirement plan.

His retirement proposal, with his vows to her.

His hazelnut binder, like a scrapbook—filled with accounts of his travels, containing the visions he'd received of his very mortal love for her.

As he approached the bridge over the Thames, the past week was a tumult in his mind. The goods in his trunk, meetings and travels and dreams, Julian's shewings. For him had it all been inspiration or desperation, vision or hallucination? Was what he was feeling love or dread? Maybe both, he decided, as he crossed the river.

When Mae opened her folks' door to him, Max and Arthur greeted their mom with a quick hug and rushed past to see their grandparents. He stood on the threshold with his box, as full as his heart. He said, "I come bearing gifts."

Mae pulled him across and kissed him on the lips, the box between them. "It's about time, silly man."

John Van Rys lives on a hobby farm outside Dunnville, Ontario, with his wife April, dogs, cats, horses, free-run egg-laying hens, and his mother-in-law. When he's not at home caring for animals, he's teaching English at Redeemer University. He's had poems published in *The New Quarterly* and *Dappled Things*, and short stories in *The New Quarterly*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Agnes and True*, and *Blank Spaces*. His story "Under the Honey Moon" was longlisted for the Peter Hinchcliffe Short Fiction Award; his stories "Nether Lands" and "Eggsistential Crisis" were both shortlisted for a Word Award from The Word Guild, with "Eggsistential Crisis" winning. His first book-length collection, the story cycle *Moonshine Promises*, was published in 2021 by Wipf and Stock. "The Homely Dreams of a Silly Soul" is part of the collection he's currently working on, tentatively titled *The Healing Arts*. You can find out more about John's writing at <http://johnvanrys.com/>.

TYLER JAMES RUSSELL

Some Future Berry

The Boy-Who-is-not-Quite-a-Man gentles a clump to his nose—careful not to fold or otherwise stress the branch—and inhales. Dusty, soured, only a hint of deeply buried sweetness. You might still call it a blueberry, if you were feeling generous, but the clusters are dwarfed, green, mostly juiceless, not at all what you imagine when you think of pies and muffins. The seeds have been long ago wronged and altered and now the plant is not even worth its name, but it's what they have, and so, a delicacy.

He plucks one from its stem and places it in his mouth, eyes closed. He will hold this for as long as he can, fruit poised between his teeth, savoring, before he bites.

Bad seeds, bad fruit, the Teacher said.

The Boy-on-the-Threshold drove his mother here, the third of five transports in the caravan. She is a garrulous woman with an aptitude for names and social detail, the kind of woman who always remembers your birthday, making you think that maybe she considers you a closer friend than you realized, and that you are, thus, memorably special. Most of the Pickers are women—along with the young and infirm—but each transport has a driver (ie. Runner) and the Boy needs the practice if he is going to take on one of the now-vacant Runner postings next growing season.

He and the other Runners stand by their vehicles as the Pickers disappear into the scrub. The country all around is flat, a few stands of leafless trees forming a gap-toothed perimeter. Presumably, this was farmland Before, but the soil has long since blown away, leaving only this small miracle, a knot of bushes, alone in what must have once been a field of green and plenty. To the east, the dust thrown up by their caravan has mostly settled; to the west, it's clear.

They'll keep one tense eye on the western road, all of them, every few minutes, watching for the tell-tale sign of haze approaching, signs of the Others.

The Teacher was not old or young. Neither rich nor poor. When he came they listened, but his coming and going was unpredictable as the seasons, and as soon as he left you'd probably forget what he looked like.

The Boy's father was one of his earliest, most earnest students. He'd repeat the lessons later, at home in their Unit, despite his mother's good-natured eye-rolling.

The Rains came earlier than expected, and then the Dry, which was new. His father wondered if that meant something. He said the Teacher said there are many ways to communicate. That if you were an infinite god you'd have infinite ways.

The Boy-Who-Doesn't-Know-How-to-Think-of-Himself still grows bored more quickly than the other Runners. A last holdover of childhood, they think, but it's actually something new. Ever since his Father—well, he doesn't like to stay still now. It's safer to be moving. Or, if not safer, at least more enjoyable. He tries to enjoy the little things, each moment.

This is why he follows the Pickers into the bushes, savoring the smells, the stolen crush of a single not-berry. Each fruit is to be picked and stored, brought back to the community for storage and distribution, but he can't help himself. Or, maybe, doesn't care to help himself. Usually, he is very much *in* control of himself, perhaps to a fault, but he is a young man and so it's easy to assume otherwise.

We'll let this one go.

He sets his weapon on the ground and pierces the skin of the not-berry between his teeth, the lower half of his mouth filling immediately with acidic sweetness, but as he turns the pulp over with his tongue and is about to chew a second, softer time, someone stands in the bushes just ahead of him, where he thought no one was, and eyes immediately find his through the leaves.

Busted.

In a moment, though, he'll recognize her, and swallow, and promptly forget what he was worried about.

Every time he returned, before beginning, the Teacher would ask for the community to "give themselves over" in some way as payment. Usually this meant food, but these days everything was scarce—food had been disappearing from the Cache-Unit, probably nothing, just someone forgetting to log the Distributions properly, but still—which meant anything could be a gift, so the Teacher accepted whatever good-faith payment they felt capable and inspired to make. He was not discriminating, they found, and a Teacher willing to travel the roads was surely something special, in these times.

The Boy's father gave a hard-bound book, a scavenged treasure from his Running days. His Mother, as a gesture of her conversion, offered three jars of preserves. They asked the Boy what he would give, if he wanted to, and even though they stressed that it was up to him it didn't feel much like a choice.

As soon as the Boy-Caught-Between-Shores recognizes the freckles on the other side of the bush, his whole body tightens. They have been seeing each other for some time now—not dating, understand, just actually, literally *seeing*. A looking-away smile at Distribution, half-waves as they pass in the Tunnel, but her Unit is one of the new ones, and he has not yet learned her name.

She reminds him of the pictures he's seen of various, now-gone trees. A willow, maybe, or maple. A thing that doesn't survive anymore, but once rooted itself firmly in whatever earth it pleased. She seems like a hold-over from what the past must have been like. The way they tell it in their Remembering-Stories.

Now, the Boy stares openly as she, too, returns his gaze. At this moment, enfolded in starved bushes, they are more alone than they have ever been, and he recognizes it as one of those times, the moments that

come so rarely and your behavior at these junction-points comes to define so much you never anticipated. He has been told enough stories to realize this. He knows he is between paths, this Boy-Who-is-Becoming, and if he decides to hold back, to turn away bashfully again, red-flamed, who could blame him? He is at that exact age where little is expected of him. He can only surprise.

So he decides to do exactly that, surprise. He opens his mouth to speak to her, but before he can say anything her eyes go over his shoulder, widen. He keeps watching her face—earth-blue eyes, asymmetric freckling. It will be the last peaceful moment before he will turn, too, and see dust on the road, coming from the west.

“Love,” the Teacher said, “is making yourself permeable.”

The Boy-still-a-Boy sat at the front of the now-crowded causeway, the largest indoor space they had, his wrists gripped in the Teacher’s dry hands so that it almost-but-didn’t hurt.

“You should welcome every interruption that comes your way,” the Teacher said.

He always taught this way, sitting, barefoot, holding hands with with one person, speaking as if there were no one else in the world, even though every other person in the Boy’s literal world was now there, watching. His mother, shifting on her legs, his father leaning against a wall. He didn’t know if he was supposed to answer.

“How can I raise my guard against a brother,” the Teacher said, “and still keep my heart soft? How can I patrol the borders of my time, and still love those who cross it?”

He saw his father shaking his head, leaning forward.

“You can’t,” the Boy said, and his father relaxed, proud.

“And if you are hated, haven’t you also hated first?”

It was a strange question. The Boy wasn’t aware of anyone who hated him.

“Are not others, in some way, also you?”

At that, you could feel the room stiffen. Did he mean others, or Others? People tilted their heads. His mother turned, frowning, to his father, and the Boy suddenly wanted to be anywhere other than where he was.

The Teacher could have stopped there, probably, and the room would have placated. But then he took it too far.

The Teacher touched the Boy's chin. He looked directly into his eyes. "What does love mean if not sharing?" he asked. "The Others to the west..." Here he paused, turning for the first time to the entire filled causeway, smiling at his own provocative wisdom.

"Can you really give them nothing?"

The Boy-Who-Sometimes-Imagines-Himself-a-Storybook-Hero watches dust encroaching via the western road, as if the ground were unzipping, releasing the first wisps of chaos into the air.

The moment freezes. He does not yell for the Runners, does not spring into any sort of action. Instead, he stares, unable to accept what's in front of him, or at least unwilling to act dramatically and then look the fool if he's wrong.

The girl disappears into the bushes. Someone screams. As the rest of the Pickers and Runners scatter, the Others' transports approach until you can see their bug-eyed helmets jammed over their never-shown faces, the bacterial symbols, their weapons raised and ready.

Soon the flat report of bullets will sound odd but unremarkable in the air. Other sounds go on as normal—wind, leaf-rustle. The lone woman—his mother—who doesn't yet realize what is happening and continues to sing.

The Leader-Council interrogated the Teacher then and there.

They'd been the ones to sound the alarm a year ago, after the Rot subsided, when the barren land a county over was suddenly occupied by a strange people who'd marked their territory with animal skulls and sharpened logs. They'd been the brink of war ever since.

In a starving land, isn't there only enough for one community? If five people insist on splitting one man's portion, doesn't everyone then starve?

The Teacher shrugged. "There is always enough," he said.

And what about when there isn't? the Leader-Council asked.

It was only late in the course of questioning—after he'd been doused in water, burned, and finally stripped searched—that they found what they'd been looking for.

There—beneath the collar-bone, on the left side. A curled spray of bacterial appendages. Didn't it look like the Others' symbol, done in crude knife work? It never came to a vote though, because in his pocket they found the stolen Cache-Unit keycard.

The Boy-Who's-Been-Told-He's-Now-the-Man-of-the-Unit feels warm against the inside of his thigh. He's pissed himself, crouched between the transports, telling himself he's waiting for the right moment, but has no idea what the right moment would look like if it showed, which it shows no sign of doing.

He can't quite *feel* what he's seeing. The Others prowl the perimeter of the field, firing sporadically. If you didn't know what they were doing they'd look like workers. No adrenalized vengeance, no hateful whooping. They all look vaguely bored. One of them raises his rifle and cuts a woman down like old wheat, great quantities of blood leaping from her head and chest and femoral-ruptured leg, sucked up eagerly by the thirsty ground, but none of it's real. He sees it, but it's not a real thing. It can't be. Only later will he realize this was his mother.

He scans the bushes for the girl, but what could he do anyway? He'd left his weapon on the ground when he smelled the first not-quite-berry, then forgot it there as he and the girl watched each other. He watches for help, to see what the other Runners will do, but then the silence stretches on and he realizes they've probably already been killed.

He thinks he is about to do something, to break out of the Boy-He-Has-Always-Been, but he won't. Instead, he'll hide. Rather, he will *stay* hidden,

right where he is, burrowed against the nearest transport, face to the dirt, fighting not to cough it in. He will not want you to know how the fight not to cry is a harder fight than he has ever fought, and how that fight is entirely motivated by self-preservation, by not wanting to be found and shot. He'll try so hard not to hear, or know, to squeeze his shock-astonished mind shut against what they do with the bodies they pull from the bushes.

"You're with the Others," the Leader-Council said. "Ping-ponging back and forth. Trying to get us to open our land, share our food. All so they can take us over. And now..." They waggled the keycard.

The Teacher looked at them, face swollen. He didn't bother denying it.

It was then that the Boy's father—the Teacher's most loyal student, who had opened his family's private stores and even, once, offered to walk solo across the county lines to deliver a message of goodwill to the Others—stepped calmly to the Teacher's side. Maybe to wash his feet, it looked like, or to kiss him, people said later. But the Boy is confident of what he saw: his father's hand, clenched to a white-knuckled fist. Sometimes he imagines his father actually doing it, punching the swindler with relish, all the family's failure compacted to flesh and force.

But before it could happen, the Room released its breath. Rushed forward like a wave of rage-water, enveloping them both.

"He was," the Boy insisted the next morning to his mother, digging, the two of them alone. "He was going to punch him. I saw it."

His mother didn't say anything. She didn't cry. They kept their eyes to the dirt, aware they were being watched closely now.

If they'd looked up, they would have seen the Teacher, and beyond him, another body they really didn't want to see, bound to the nearest Power Poles with an extraordinary amount of duct tape. The Teacher's one hand had ripped free and he listed to the side, dangling, saggy. For someone who claimed to know almost everything, he looked more than a little surprised.

The Boy-Who-is-Now-Always-Something-Other-Than-What-He-Might-Have-Been,-Stunted-and-Green-and-Wronged, startles into his body,

still burrowed under the transport, and for a moment doesn't remember what happened. Then, he does, and, ashamed, realizes he fell asleep.

How much time has passed? The sun is near-fallen, but by the stillness of the earth and the ache in his legs he feels almost certain he's slept the night and most of the next day through. He feels so goddamn well-rested. It has been maybe the best sleep of his life, which will haunt him for some time.

He listens for Others, survivors, but wind is the only sound.

The Boy breathes the dirt, the thin dust out of which nothing will grow, and he tries—and fails—not to cry. In a moment he will scoot himself out from his hiding place, and force his eyes to the Poles up and down the road, then to the bodies done in conscious imitation, and he will look for his mother, the girl, trying to find one he can recognize, as if staring at them will save him but it won't.

Tyler James Russell is the author of *To Drown a Man* (2020), a poetry collection, and *When Fire Splits the Sky* (2022), a novel, both from Unsolicited Press. He works as an educator and lives in Pennsylvania with his wife Cat and their children. His writing has been nominated for the Rhysling and Best of the Net, and has appeared or is forthcoming in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *F(r)iction*, *Janus Literary*, and *the NonBinary Review*, among others. You can find him at Tylerjamesrussell.com, or on Twitter at @TJamesRussell.

DAVID FORREST

Bad Prophet

The old prophet never lied. He never spoke a mean word. He never lifted a hand out of anger or hurt another soul.

And in this small way he never sinned.

At the same time, the old prophet never told the truth. He never spoke. He never lifted a hand in love or helped another soul.

And in this way he never lived.

God whispered to him once. Ever since that day he could see the invisible. There were stars on neighbours faces and crowns on the heads of refugees. When people spoke in the present he could hear their past. He saw everything and told no-one.

The silent prophet could no longer separate spirit from his other senses. When he sensed a pull towards a person, it had the same gentle push as the wind against his back. A name had a sound to it, and that sound told a future. Surely, he reasoned, everyone could hear it. If objects glowed from the souls who last touched them then surely everyone could see the glow. And if they didn't then who was he to call it so? In the past false prophets told the people what they wanted to hear. This prophet was neither false nor true; he told the people nothing.

The old prophet lived in an apartment by himself. There were no uncovered windows or mirrors on the walls to trigger his gift. Dusty old books lined the walls. Cupboards held only empty frames and empty notebooks. He wondered why people never spoke to one another. Why things never changed. And why God was so silent.

In the past, he had been a man of God. He had protested governments. He had built up charities, befriended strangers. Declared the love of God in his own day. He was comfortable with that. Prophets rarely fled the past.

Love others, he would say, as you love yourself.

He saw other prophets rise. As their wisdom increased so their grace increased all the more. They nurtured love and tended peace – never taking it for granted that the dove would remain. They needed instruction. Encouragement. The old prophet encouraged them, for he knew that they were true.

He wouldn't admit to jealousy. The more he taught about past victories, the more jealous he felt. Eventually apathy replaced action and reason replaced apathy. Others called it wisdom. There were good reasons not to do good things. With time he learned them all. Take care not to offend, he counselled bolder voices. Always listen, he said. Never act, he meant.

Do not be hasty. Do not be foolish. Do not do.

Inside a voice told him he was fading. He listened to the voice but never answered it. He was too wise for that. When bitterness crept in it wasn't directed at the voice or himself or anyone else. It just sat there growing. It didn't move him, he didn't follow it, it simply stayed.

Love others as you love yourself. Those words were written inside his bible on the top shelf of his cupboard in a room he didn't use. Love others as you love yourself. There was a symmetry to it - it was the second command and it could be broken two ways. He had rescued others, helped others, found others. He had been their prophet – wasn't that love? A pastor once asked him if he loved himself. He smiled and said 'No-one is perfect, son'.

He didn't need to write down the first commandment. It was written in his heart. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and mind and strength. He could recite it endlessly. Love the Lord your God. Love the Lord your God. Love the Lord your God. Love the Lord your God. Love the Lord your job.

The charity work, the work he did for the church - surely he more than anyone else had loved God. But sometimes he felt so distant from God when he was doing it. He felt sure he had loved his neighbour. He just couldn't name one. And he had tried to love himself but even that he'd done alone.

The old prophet wrote his will. He apologised for every true word he never spoke. For every spoken word he never acted. In the end, he knew these things were his will, not God's.

He saw the minds of others, some living, some dead. He called them to life. Andrew, he wrote, within five years you will open a bakery, just as you've always dreamt. Sarah, your children will know God. He resolved to bless his neighbours with his last words and leave nothing for himself.

Turn and love, he wrote. Replace fear with love. Wage peace against poverty. Banish anxiety from every home and family. It was time to boldly declare and boldly, boldly share.

The old prophet got down to his knees and prayed. He shaved his beard and tore his clothes. He didn't ask God to find Him, God had done that. He didn't ask God to love Him, God had always done that. He simply found God. He simply loved.

He got up from his knees, sealed the will in an envelope and wrote the name and address of the executor. He hadn't contacted a solicitor to enact his decision. If his life were to stand for something then it would be read by the one who had the power to make it stand. Someone reluctant but faithful and with nothing to gain.

He posted his will. And on the third day he received it.

David Forrest tries to write stories that question himself and others so it's probably for the best that he has other sources of income - in his professional life he is a software engineer and former particle physicist who sees poetry in creation and creation in poetry. His first collection, *From Glasgow to Damascus*, was published by Palewell Press in 2021 and contains pieces inspired by the perspectives of Syrian refugees living in Glasgow. David's current project, oh so nearly finished, collects short stories and poems with a spiritual perspective on love and purpose. As a spoken word artist he has performed at arts events, poetry slams and festivals around the UK, primarily in a secular context. An unreconstructed millennial, his Facebook page can be found at <http://www.facebook.com/davidforrestwriter>

THOMAS ALLBAUGH

A Table Story

After they took away the chairs and the table with the permanent food stains and scratch marks where their son always ate, he remained in the empty dining room thinking about it. You could always replace the furniture. But not the marks. You could buy distressed jeans but not distressed furniture, unless it was someone else's at Goodwill. Then it was someone else's history, family.

Most of the house felt empty. He brought a folding chair in from the hallway where the open cabinet was empty of towels, opened the folding chair in the middle of the floor, and sat down. He rubbed his elbow. His collar bone had healed; he still had some pain in the morning when the air was cold. After about six months, it was mostly just aching in his shoulder.

The call that she was coming for the table had left him out of sorts and he hadn't slept. He wasn't sure if she would come when they took the furniture. And then she didn't come. He glanced at the window. Perhaps he would use a tray table now.

She had not taken their bed, with the memory foam mattress that held their wounds night after night.

He rubbed his eyes. The folding chair wasn't comfortable. They were made for auditoriums

*

He went for a walk. After a few blocks, he came to a field left wild in the summer and fenced in, the now dry weeds a brittle dead wildness kept from the rest of the neighborhood, an abandoned garden of Eden, with chain-link fences instead of angels with swords of fire. He looked at the weeds nodding there and thought about the memorial service. Her family had mostly stayed away. Those who came ignored him. Word had spread quickly, of course, and opinions were certain. He glanced at the clouds beyond the trees and houses on the other side of the field and then back

at the wild field where the weeds went up to the fence. The thought came to him. “Only You bring good from evil.” Though he had not stopped looking at the weeds, he realized that what he’d said was directed to God. He glanced up instinctively, said, “I wait for you to do this. How does this work, good from evil? I can’t picture it. I can’t do it.”

He was beyond caring that he had never done this before, except maybe in childhood. He had never made a vow as an adult. Well, he had at their wedding, but that was different. That was two people, planning, agreeing, no matter what, about something that people did all the time and succeeded at. This new one he didn’t know how to live with, because he didn’t know and couldn’t know. The freeway incident had happened so fast and it was over and they still had no suspect. All he had done was cut someone off, sort of accidentally.

It was the “sort of” part that left him sad. In the church he and his wife had attended, people would often make vows. But then what happened? He’d never seen how they worked out. One of the last times he went—after his wife had stopped going with him—one of the ladies who still talked to him had said, “Just think how God suffered the loss of His son.” This was meant to be profound about suffering and the problem of evil. It was supposed to make him think. But he was so sad about the “sort of” part and how he was to blame, and then he got lost in the labyrinth of theology the comparison naturally opened up on. He thought about his part in it.

*

In the evening, he sat under the patio light in the back yard. He couldn’t see the neighboring yards, with the walls that surrounded his own.

Suddenly, to his left, the neighbor’s garage light went on and then the neighbor came out, a tall man, his full head of black hair and a black mustache.

The neighbor waved. He set the trash he had brought out down and walked through the gate and came over to him. “So your wife left,” the neighbor said.

He nodded.

“Road rage,” the neighbor said, “what can you do? I mean them, not you.”

He stared at the dark shape of the grill, nodded absently.

After a moment, the neighbor said, “Well, if you need anything, let me know.”

“Thanks.” He glanced at his neighbor’s mustache. It was black. Did he use hair coloring?

He had not seen it this close before. He said, “You know, some people don’t become better than themselves until they have children.”

The neighbor stared at him. He was big enough to be a bouncer at a club.

“I didn’t start trying,” he said, almost to something he’d been thinking about rather than what had been said, “until the birth of my son. That’s what it took.” He re-crossed his legs.

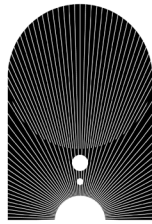
His neighbor bowed his head. “I really can’t imagine what you are going through.” He glanced into the dark. “But if you need something, let us know.” He turned and went back to his yard, picked up the trash bags, and disappeared.

He watched him walk away. He was tall.

Before she had left, his wife had on several occasions heard sounds coming from their yard by the neighbor’s house, usually in the daytime. She had thought that their son’s friends had come back to play in there. But every time she sent him out to look, the RV space was empty, quiet. The bikes not used or moved from where they had been left leaning against the fence. No one was there.

Next door, a door closed. He watched the neighbor’s garage lights go out.

Thomas Allbaugh’s poems and stories have appeared in a variety of journals, including *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, *Relief*, and *River Heron Review*. He’s published a novel, *Apocalypse TV*, a collection of short stories, *Subtle Man Loses His Day Job* and other stories, and a chapbook of poetry titled *The View* from January. He is a professor of English at Azusa Pacific University, where he teaches composition and creative writing.



HOMILIES

PAUL J. PASTOR

The Narrow Door

A Homily for August 21, 2022, preached at All Souls Anglican Church, in Portland, Oregon.

Jesus went through one town and village after another, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, 'Lord, will only a few be saved?' He said to them, 'Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able. When once the owner of the house has got up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, "Lord, open to us", then in reply he will say to you, "I do not know where you come from." Then you will begin to say, "We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets." But he will say, "I do not know where you come from; go away from me, all you evildoers!" There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrown out. Then people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.'

Luke 13: 22-30 NRSV

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. Amen.

Today, I would like us to meditate upon the difficult and misunderstood concept of *narrowness*. This is the theme that, if you look for it unites all the Church's traditional readings today, finding its most clear expression in the passage that we just received—Christ's teaching of The Narrow Door.

There is perhaps no other doctrine so poised to prompt a reaction from contemporary people, especially Portlanders such as ourselves. After all, barring the worst crimes, there is little seen worthy of judgment here besides judgmentalism. Little to be excluded besides attitudes of exclusivity. And though narrowness in the way Christ uses it does not neatly fall under the categories of either judgment nor exclusivity—at least not in the way we might define those terms, the moment we hear the word: “narrow” our minds, or at least the minds of our secular neighbors, are carried to the smallest, most cliched elements popularly associated with Christianity: the social archetypes of The Bigot or The Picketeer with the “Turn or Burn” sign, or That Guy Who Leaves Evangelistic Tracts For Waitresses Instead of Tips.

I do not blame such a reflexive reaction, even if I believe it to be unfair. It is, at least in its beginnings, a *learned* reaction. Rather than the expansive grace, the unconditional love, and the sacrificial compassion that ought to mark the lives of Christ’s followers, too often those associated with the name of Jesus have been small, judgmental, legalistic, rude, eager to condemn, and rather bad at parties. But of course, it is not the whole story, and even for us, the word “narrow” may need gentle reconsideration. In this, there is no better passage than our gospel reading this morning.

Our reading begins with a brief story, one which is found only in St. Luke’s Gospel. Christ is making his way as an itinerant preacher through rural Judea, wending his way inevitably toward Jerusalem. And beside the ministry of miracles and healings which is spreading his fame through the country, it is his teaching in the classic style of the wandering rabbi that we glimpse here. On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus is asked a simple question by a member of the crowd: *Are only a few to be saved?*

We quickly attach to this question. It is one we have asked as well. Besides the grand seminary hypotheticals—what of those who have never

heard?—the question becomes poignant for us as there arise before us the faces of those we know, those perhaps whom we love, who we know with confidence are far from Christ, perhaps far by choice, by definite choice. *Are only a few to be saved?* Only those who say the magic prayer? Those born in the right time, and under favorable stars? Are only a few to be saved? Those lucky, those privileged?

And for us here, in 2022, in Portland, Oregon, we want Christ to respond to this question definitively and with a resounding *No!* We want him to answer with the full force of the Gospel message. That Good News so potently distilled by the apostle John, who wrote that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten so, that whosoever—WHOSOEVER—believes in him might have everlasting life. We want him to quote St. Paul, who knew that God was reconciling all things—ALL THINGS—to the Father through Christ Jesus, Paul who further saw that Christ would be the firstborn of MANY brothers and sisters, not few, *MANY*.

We want to hear all this from Christ. But instead, we are given a mysterious cluster of cryptic phrases. And among those phrases a single word stands tall, drawing all our eyes like the North Pole draws the compass needle: “*narrow*.”

“Narrow.” The Greek term translated here seems to be a very old word, older even than the proper Greek language itself. English gets it pretty much right: “narrow” is a good translation. “Tight” would be another. The old English translation of “strait” as in, say “the Straits of Magellan” is also pretty good. But it is the concept of danger and ability to fit that we ought to note here, and which ought to be our first clue that our common thinking about this word may not be faithful to the text. “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” Jesus says, “for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be *able*.”

I think, when I read these words, of the longhouses of the Chinook peoples upon whose traditional lands we now are living. While many of their descendants remain here to this day, many tragedies, particularly post-contact disease, meant that entire tribes, bands, and clans, entire local dialects were lost within a matter of a few generations, mostly in the later 1700s and early 1800s. Because of our wet environment, and the Chinook tradition of building almost exclusively with wood, there is very little evidence of the density of population that was here before the settlement of European-descended people. But both oral tradition and our best archeological evidence indicate that here, in the Willamette valley and extending up the Columbia Gorge was a rich and developed civilization, whose trade relationships extended from Alaska to far Southwest, from the Pacific Coast to deep in the continent's interior. Celilo Falls, now inundated deep under the waters of The Dalles Dam, was so bustling at the time of the salmon trading that it was called the "Wall Street of Native America," and it is said, likely reliably, that the greatest chief, whose name was Multnomah—whose name of course is living on among us in the names of many local places—could field an army of ten thousand young warriors clad in their famous "clamons" body armor, supple and nearly invulnerable, made from boiled elk hide.

I digress a bit. But humor me. Perhaps you have had the honor of going into a reconstruction of one of the Chinook longhouses, such as the Cathlapotle Plankhouse up in Ridgefield, Washington, reconstructed on the site of a village that dates at least to 1450. I have, and it is quite wonderful, making you feel at once the foolishness of the little personalized boxes that we shut ourselves up in in our culture. A longhouse belonged to an extended family, and depending on the size could house 40-80 people or more. The walls were made of great thick planks split from the rot-resistant, aromatic wood of the Western Red Cedar. The heart of the house was a sunken circular pit for a fire and cooking. The smoke from the pit went up toward a soaring ceiling high above the heads of the people. There were organized sections for raised food storage, for equipment storage,

and areas, sometimes open, sometimes screened, for individual family units to have some semblance of personal space. Carved or painted figures told the ancestry and story of the family. Lavish feasting was of great value to the tribes, who excelled in preparing dishes of rich salmon and the cooked camas root, which had something like the flavor of a baked pear and the texture of a water chestnut. People of social status held what we call a potlatch in great honor, where the host would demonstrate their wealth and generosity with extravagant cuisine and hospitality and the giving of expensive gifts.

But of note is this fact: the plankhouse, this place of family and belonging, and feasting, and safety, and shelter, had no windows, and no doors, except for one. Can you call it a door? I am not sure you can. It is a hole. Sized perhaps three and a half or four feet. Positioned so that to get in, you must both duck your head and lift your feet to enter with a sort of awkward hop—quite uncomfortable, and allowing one or two people inside to quite effectively identify all entrants and, should it be needed, defend the house. I have seen the same principle in the walled city of York in England, and in the Gate of the ancient city of Megiddo in what is now Israel, and in cattle pens and the parts of old barns where you want to shear a sheep: narrowness. The pinch point. The moment of decision, of evaluation. Are you friend or enemy? Are you ready? Are you able to enter? *Are you known?* And like the plankhouse, such an eye is good.

Tight. Narrow. “Strive to enter through the narrow door,” Jesus says, “for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.” And with that, just like that, we feel that Christ has said something he has not, something we fear is terrible, that calls into question the gospel being actually *good news* and so we miss what has actually been said.

And in this we are in danger of missing the key point of the whole exchange, because even though we think he has, *Christ did not answer the*

question. Did you catch that? It was quick, with a rabbi's turn of cryptic phrase, quick in Christ's classic and disarming style. The question was simple and concrete: *Are only a few to be saved?* It demands a yes or a no. But what is said neither of these, and in fact a total *non sequitur*: "Strive to enter through the narrow door."

The importance of this cannot be overstated. Because we read the whole remainder of the passage as if it is the answer to this person's question: *when it is actually a subversion of that question, a redirection of that question to the point that really matters*. Christ turned what should have been exposition—here is the doctrine, my son—into *exhortation*: Get in. Prevail. Try to enter.

We are in the language of parable, here, of the image, of the teaching story. Not of doctrine. What is the clear teaching of this passage? An imperative. Get inside! Now! If you can fit, get in! We read the word *able* as *allowed*, in part because of our limited and judiciary understandings of salvation. But in that word, *able*, is a whole natural logic of the kingdom. The question is *can you fit?* This is not some ableist, fat-shaming question. It refers in no way to the body, but to a leanness, a thinness of soul. It puts us in mind of rich men like camels and the eyes of needles, or in mind of the Beatitude: *Blessed are the poor* (small, humble) *in spirit*, and we glimpse for a minute the fact that salvation is an extension of the logic of God seen present in all of Creation: what is able to live will live. What is incapable of life will die. To the one with much, more will be given, to the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away, and *oh* that sounds *so* unfair until you realize that Christ is teaching about *life*. The one with even a spark of it will be met like a child and welcomed home. The one who has become a servant of death will be, of course, unknown and unknowable to the Master of the feast of creation. It is not ours, is *never* ours to say who is who. That is the Master's job. It is ours to strive to enter to bend ourselves into the awkward bow of entrance. It is our job to try to join the feast.

What is the point? *Be known by the master of the house!* Don't wait. Don't stand out in the dark, when there is a feast going on inside. Oh, did

you miss that? The feast? The one with the prophets and the patriarchs, and oh, I don't know *People from the literal four corners of the earth?* Few to be saved? We are talking North and South and East and West reclining at table here. Boy, we should have liked Jesus to answer our question simply, but he has done something better. He has given us a vision of the eternal feast. And it is huge. Will few be saved? No. Many will not be able to fit, *but that is not the same thing as saying few will be saved.* The whole earth is there, all the misfits and rejects and sinners and beggars, and screw-ups and flops and *all* who can fit through the door, *all* who are known by the master of the feast and called to join the greatest party that the universe has ever known. But if you're "big"? You won't fit. Carrying the riches of your life with you? You won't fit. Trying to smuggle in your pet sin under your coat? Trying to bring your huge and polished righteousness? Try to name drop? "Oh yeah, I was with Jesus before it was cool." Sorry, you won't fit.

And is this not the holy and gentle harshness of the Good News? For there is light and there is darkness. There must be. It can be no other way. There are real stakes in the game, great stakes. There is inside and there is outside. There is first and there is last. There are those who are known and there are those who are not known. There is a *door*. Doors are made to open. They are also made to close. To deny this is to deny the heart of the Good News. But likewise, we deny the Good news when we allow anything—anything—to distract from the broadness and welcome and simple generosity of the picture Christ paints for us here.

And so as we note that Christ has given us an icon, an *image* rather than cold doctrine, an image of a narrow door behind which sits a great feast, a banquet spread for the four corners of the earth by a careful and compassionate Master, as we hold this image in our mind today, to be faithful to the text we must allow Christ to challenge us: *are we willing to*

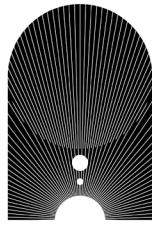
bow and be known, willing to enter through the narrow door to the great gift-giving, the mighty and unending feast?

This looks, certainly, like the moment of salvation. But it also looks like the process of formation, what St. Paul calls “being saved.” For as we come today to the table, and, much like stepping into a plankhouse, bend ourselves awkwardly and kneel, we are saying, *Know us Father. We are yours in Christ. His body for us, his blood for us. Let us keep the feast.* We are practicing here in time the central motion of eternity: the endless, all-consuming celebration.

Toward this, let us strive, undistracted by all lesser questions, always bending in Christlike humility to enter through that great and lovely paradox of the narrow door.

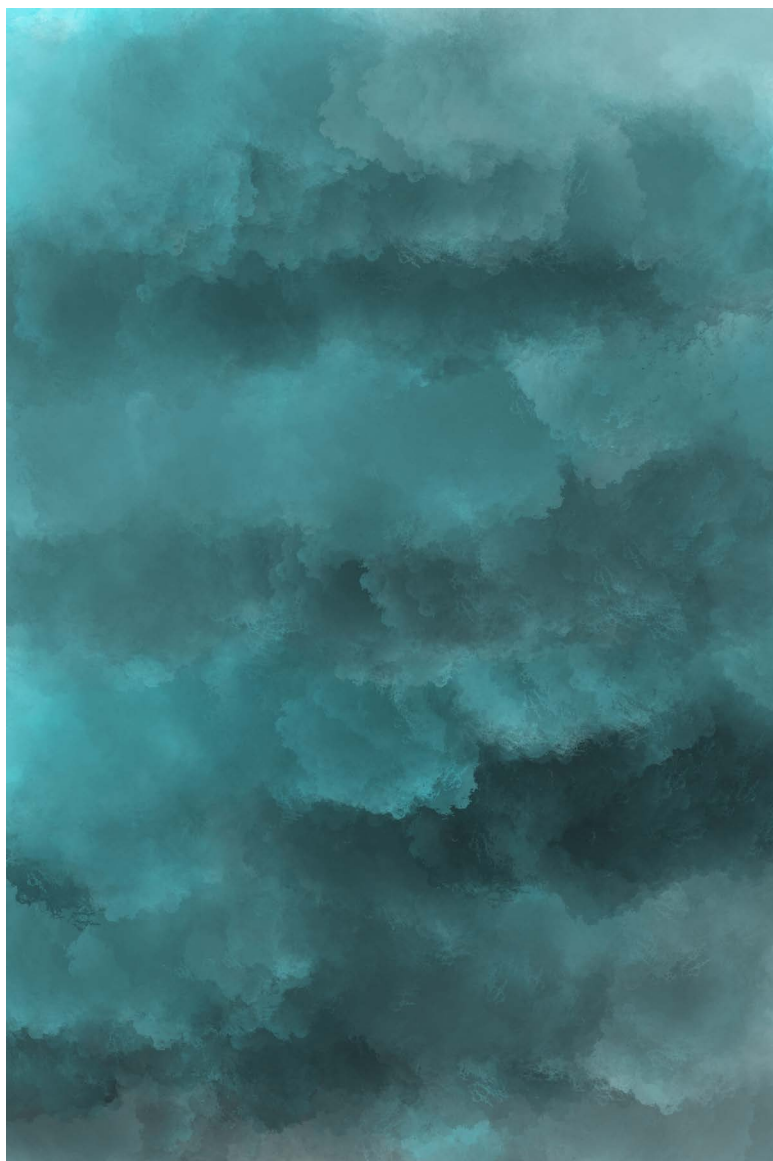
In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Paul J. Pastor is an award-winning writer and editor (for Penguin Random House), whose most recent book is *Bower Lodge: Poems*. His work has appeared widely, including in *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *FORMA*, *The Windhover*, *Ekstasis*, *North American Anglican*, *Fathom*, and many other excellent outlets, and has been anthologized by the *New York Quarterly Review*. He is a candidate for Master of Fine Art in Poetry at the University of St. Thomas. He lives in Oregon.

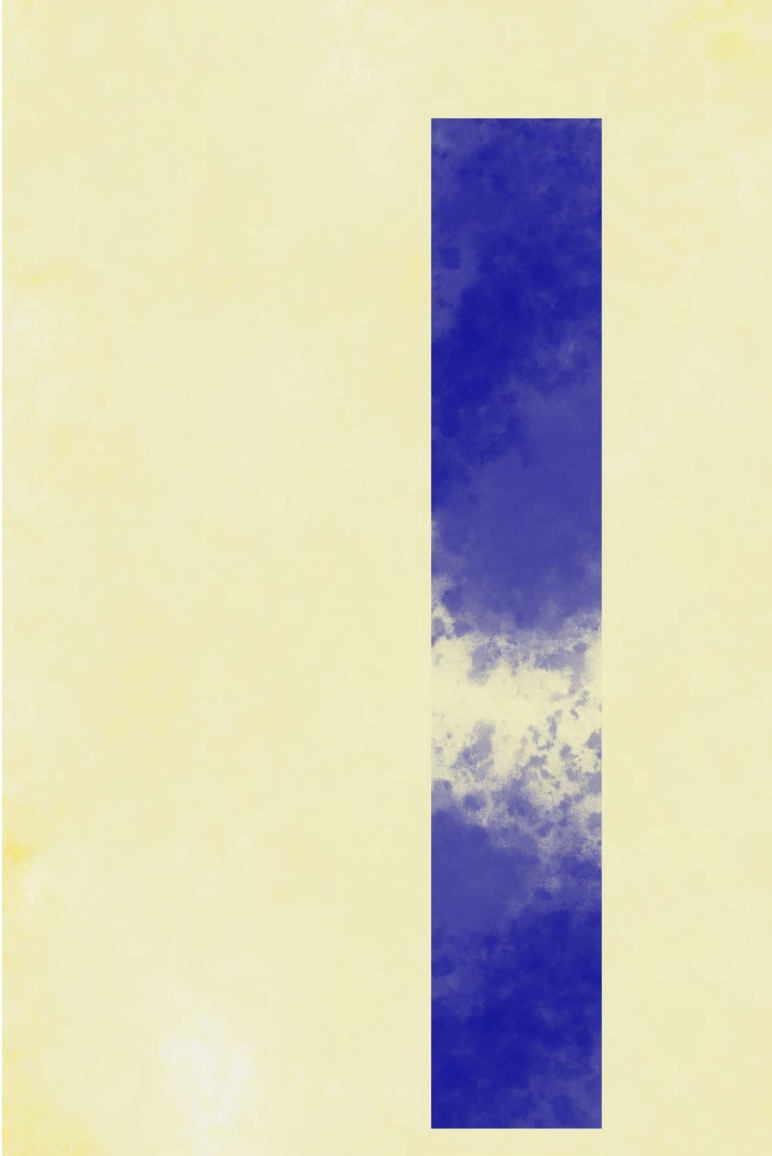


VISUAL ART

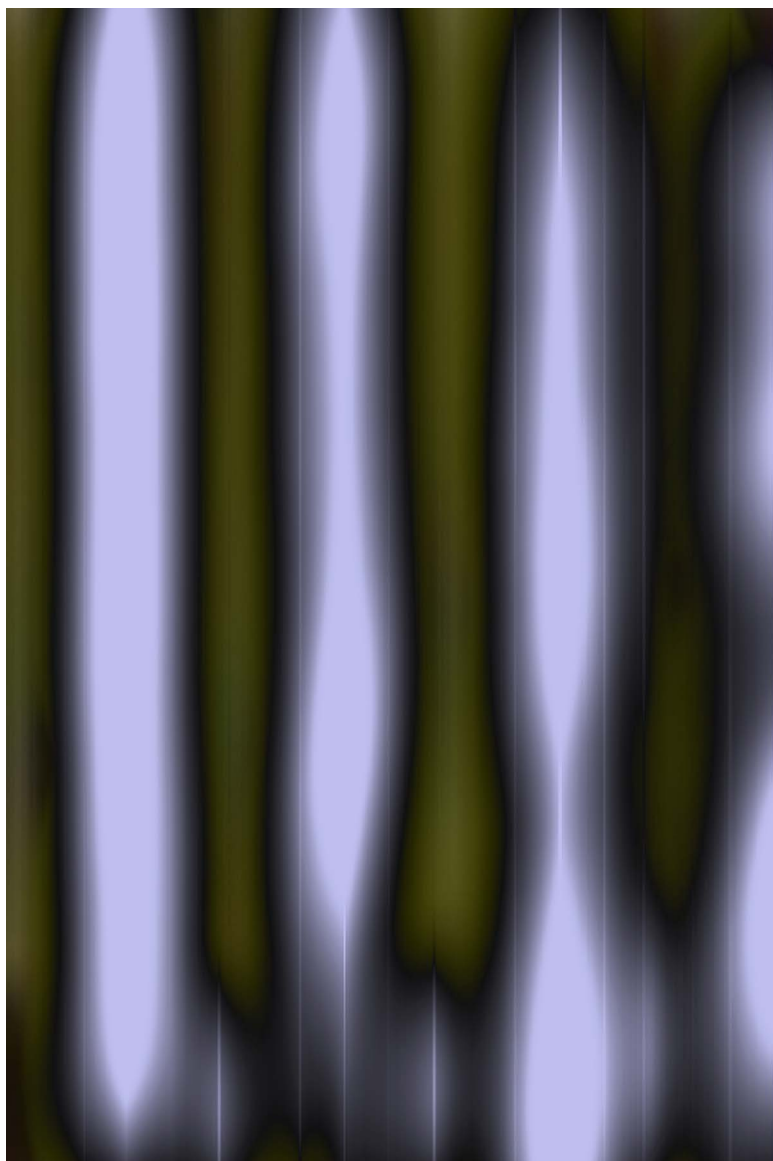
EDWARD LEE



LEE, *A Dream Reshapes*, 2022. Digital painting.



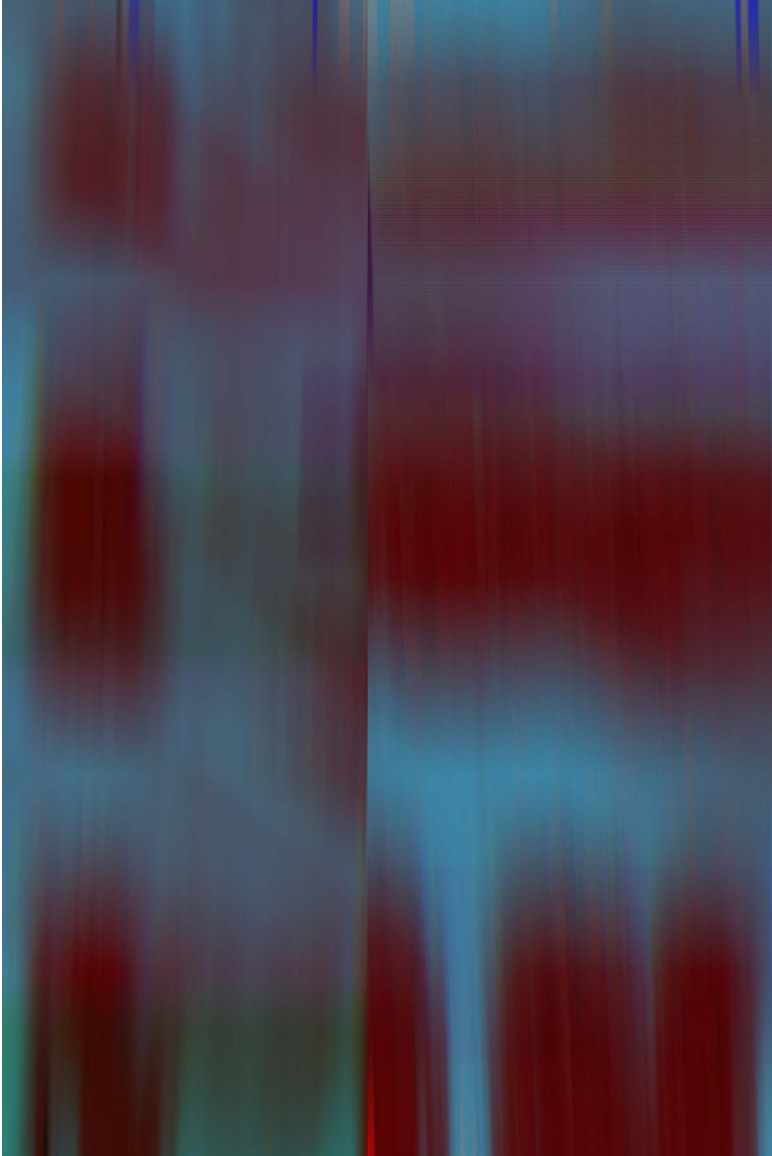
LEE, *Inertia*, 2022. Digital painting.



LEE, *Broken Blessings*, 2022. Digital painting.



LEE, *The Path to Reach*, 2022. Digital painting.



LEE, *Waterfall*, 2022. Digital painting.

Edward Lee is an artist and writer from Ireland. His paintings and photography have been exhibited widely, while his poetry, short stories, non-fiction have been published in magazines in Ireland, England and America, including *The Stinging Fly*, *Skylight 47*, *Acumen* and *Smiths Knoll*. He is currently working on two photography collections: ‘Lying Down With The Dead’ and ‘There Is A Beauty In Broken Things’.

He also makes musical noise under the names Ayahuasca Collective, Orson Carroll, Lego Figures Fighting, and Pale Blond Boy.

His blog/website can be found at <https://edwardmlee.wordpress.com>.

LAWRENCE ROWSWELL



ROWSWELL, 2022.



ROWSWELL, 2022.



ROWSWELL, 2021.

Lawrence Rowswell takes pictures, writes poetry and works in theatre in the greater Buffalo, NY area.

ORIANA STEVENS



STEVENS, *Of Wonders You Shall Behold*, 2018. Oil on wood panel, 36" round.



STEVENS, *The Time Between*, 2018. Oil and gold gilding on canvas, 22" x 28".



STEVENS, *Would You Like Mustard With Your Salmon?*, 2019. Acrylic and micron pen on canvas, 24" x 24".



STEVENS, *Midsummer Mercies*, 2018. Acrylic and micron pen on wood panel, 20" round.

Oriana Sage is a visual artist who strives to bring to life the inner workings of her soul, to visually articulate the struggle and triumph that rest beneath an assumed surface. Her paintings examine the close relationship of physical position and the spirit

Oriana is fascinated by interactions of light bursting through shadow, the two-dimensional emerging into living form, and color conveying depth of feeling and vitality. Some of her favorite conceptual themes are resistance and surrender, death as an avenue to life, and the small and mundane being a metaphor for the transcendent. Oriana's process brings together two realms; the seen and familiar and what is unseen, deeply internal and that which must be sought. Familiar portraiture and flora collide with color, movement, and abstraction to reveal this relationship. The imagery of scars and thorns, solitude and waiting, portray a very real struggle, yet the struggle has an opportunity to ascend, scars grow over with soft skin, thorns become crowned with gold, and the time between cultivates a harvest of bounty.

Every image opens a small window to Oriana's own internal dialog. The rubbed mire and ache of the world converse with wonder. Her deepest hunger and hope is for God Himself - hunger drives, hope ascends.