



Issue 1

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AS SURELY AS THE SUN LITERARY



AS SURELY AS THE SUN LITERARY JOURNAL

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EDITOR'S NOTE

...

Let us acknowledge the LORD; let us press on to know Him. As surely as the sun rises, the LORD will appear. He will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth.

~ Hosea 6:3 ~

Hosea was a prophet of Yahweh during Israel's period of relative prosperity in approximately the eighth century B.C. God's chosen people had long been dwelling as a nation in the promised land before the Babylonian exile occurred in the fifth century B.C. and Israel was brought to ruin, its people conquered and enslaved. Prophets like Hosea tried to warn the Israelites of the coming destruction, to usher them back to the one true God and away from the idolatry that bound them to lives of sin. Israel, although sufficient in wealth and power, lacked faithfulness to Yahweh, neglecting His commandments and choosing to worship false gods fashioned out of metal and carved images rather than the living God who had rescued them and sustained them for generations.

Israel was a fallen people far before it fell to the Babylonians. Falling, the act of sinning, shifted from being a verb to being an adjective as the people entered into a constant state of separation from God. As if continuing the ricochet from original sin, Israel distanced itself further and further from God, and would later, with the Babylonian exile, embody the ultimate cost of disunity with Yahweh—death.

As Surely As the Sun Literary finds its namesake in Hosea chapter six, verse three. This line in Hosea's relatively short book of prophetic literature is a part of what I consider to be a pivotal interlude between laments about Israel's fallenness. The prophetic books of the Old Testament tend to be full of bleak, depressing language when reflecting on the state of God's chosen people and the destructive direction in which they were headed. But interspersed within descriptions of Israel's grim realities are verses that (and I can find no better way to describe them) truly shine against the backdrop of such darkness. Hosea 6:3 is one of these verses.

Hosea 6:3 offers a message of hope that almost seems misplaced amidst the hopelessness that characterized Israel at the time of its writing. But this is precisely one of the reasons I chose it to be *As Surely As the Sun's* title verse.

On paper, the metaphors used in this verse may not strike the reader as particularly extraordinary. But to close one's eyes and simply imagine the sun—just close enough for us to feel its warmth and not its wrath, too bright to look at but beautiful to behold, spreading its majesty over the horizon with each new dawn and each new dusk—evokes a profound sense of

awe and indebtedness to a God who still offers the hope of reconciliation to those who have disobeyed His commands and abandoned His covenant.

Here, in Hosea 6:3, is such a perfect calling and a perfect promise to such a broken people. It is relevant both retrospectively and in a modern sense, because of the universality and timelessness of human nature. We, like Israel, are prone to break promises, to fall short, and to sin. We, like Israel, are desperately in need of a God who is able and willing to keep promises, to meet us where we are, and to show us mercy. We find this perfect God in Yahweh, and in His son, Jesus Christ.

Like the rain that comes at winter's end to thaw the snow, God will heal frozen hearts. Like the rain that comes in the spring to nourish budding flowers, God will provide for the good of His creation. As surely as the sun rises, God will be present. This is God's promise to us, even when we, in our fallen state, can promise nothing in return.

But with God's promise comes a calling. In the words of Hosea 6:3, this calling is simple: "Let us acknowledge the Lord; let us press on to know Him."

God seeks the pursuit of our hearts. Acknowledgement, by its bare definition, does not seem such a worthy means of this endeavor. But within the context of this verse, its meaning implies much more. In the context of today, we find that our acknowledgment can manifest in countless ways. We read God's word. We don't attempt to conceal our faith. We put into practice the teachings of Jesus. We honor God with what we create. By this, we acknowledge God. By this, we press on to know and love Him.

The eighteen writers and artists whose work is featured in the following pages deliver not only beautifully crafted poetry and art, but also unique acknowledgments of God, new ways of understanding and receiving our holy Creator and His anointed Son.

It is my honor and privilege to present their thirty-three pieces in the inaugural issue of the *As Surely As the Sun Literary Journal*, a publication which I hope will come to serve not as its own blazing star, but a beacon reflecting the perfect light of Christ.

Soli Deo gloria,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Natasha Bredle". The ink is dark and the writing is fluid, with some loops and flourishes.

Natasha Bredle
Editor-in-Chief

THIS END

Allison Grayhurst

This end is an offspring
to tend to and adore,
breaking through distinctive patterns
that worked for a while, but now,
only harm.

This offspring is musical,
composing practices and prayers,
hungering for the details
to disinfect and clean.

This joy is unspoken,
activity with no burdensome description,
uninfected with expectations, obligations
or the guarding dog.

This house has been lived in,
all things that have died have died
again, deeper, and finally here, renewed.

Faith is the exact destination, lapping the plate
sparkling so all that is left is awe and mercy, digesting
simplicity in the swelling brightness before me.

I have you again like at the start
when I first witnessed your face
and hair and eyes and loved you
with a bliss that in the past

I could only steal from books but now
I owned, uniquely as my own.

Trees hang over the cliff.
Behind me is the summit.
My foolish hopes align
with divinity's commands.
Bars are dropped, lightweight like pins.
Moon and sun full, clearly visible
in the same morning sky.

HOME COMING

Allison Grayhurst

Returning to the kelp forest
as a companion to a larger inhabitant,
as a guest to the great reef waters,
a lover of the odd and miraculous,
seduced by succulent influences,
descending then rising all in good speed.

I welcome the sand dwellers
and the tunnel diggers. I am welcomed
by the tentacled and the fanged,
and by the soft, squishy translucent floaters.

I am just another creature that eats or will be eaten,
and I relish in this environment of unquestioning acceptance
my minuscule place.

I ride the back of the bottom feeder. I find my own
way through the caves, avoiding the high price
of this liberty.

I have returned and I am not leaving
for a more agreeable, less authentic reality.
My form is older, broken, degenerating, but

I feel it again, my nerves,
secret sensations, glorious intensity,
awakening like during the first fall,
like the first time waiting
to being caught, irrevocably
saved.

JESUS HOLDS

Allison Grayhurst

Nudging, pushing
foot-tripping to
kindle a dream that
runs publicized on every
channel, uttering its good fortune,
lined up with divine commands.

The abyss is an arrow shot right through,
splitting what doesn't belong from
the thriving harvest. If you try to
cross it, you will fall into it,
for the health of the harvest cannot be soiled
with past inclusions.

Promises made are finding
fruition and greed and bitterness
have diffused into a calm surrender
to the unknown.

This friendship lasts forever,
it does not let go
in the wake of an attaching darkness.
It banishes anger, exposes
scars covering the face
and under layered clothes.

This friendship demands no other
connection as strong as its own,

peels away the scaly scabs inside the ears,
adds up all dividends, then pays out without
scratching or lashing
the spinning inner sacred core.

HOPE

Peter Gorham

Today I cannot look myself in the eye.
The tall pines that stood for me
And set their lovely shade around my heart
Have all been massacred by the machine.
Those straight masts and moonwhite sails
That rose up like promises yesterday over the horizon
Have since changed course and carried
Their cargo to another port. My body still
Flourishes like a mountain stream in the spring melt,
But my spirit feels the first early winter frost.

I wish I were that great cross of wings, the albatross
That my body dreams itself to be. I wish
That something would bloom in the night
Taking its form slowly and carefully
In the cool of the darkest hours, dividing itself
From the emptiness, drawing up from the Earth
A new name and a clear voice, and become a prayer
So that God would see it and lean to catch
Its fragrance, in the first hour of a morning
Glistening with fresh dew. I wish I were
A country-strung garland, to crown and guard
The center of my body's door forever.

~ used with permission from Wipf and Stock publishers ~

CURVATURE

Peter Gorham

When we became clever the Earth shrank itself
Into the head of a pin, surrounded by angels
Its curvature now a real number with infinite digits.

There are rivers in the skies, and swept down one of them
I find myself far from you, months away but only hours away.
How can we really learn what space is, its viscosity,
When the heat is always set to a boil? At midnight
The Moon stands upended, its light arriving in a heartbeat.

If only my life could bend more easily than the space I am in.
Instead the clay jar around my scroll
Fractures easily. My words dry up and fragment
Dispersing like flakes of ash into the white noise.

But a music of meaning still stands unbodied somewhere;
Well-tempered, no ratios of numbers will capture it today.
Lacking words, but curving around the Word itself,
The Reason, the *Logos*, the one and clearest ringing note no
Bell can yet attain. When it rings
Our bones will gather again
And body themselves into an army.

~ used with permission from Wipf and Stock publishers ~

DO WHAT YOU CAN

Ron Hickerson

The chef is at my house for supper. He reclines at my
Kitchen table drinking wine as I prepare the meal—I
Practiced cooking it until I was sick of the taste, but
This is the first time he watches me. I wonder if he
Sees the stains on my stovetop, the smears on my fridge, and hope

To God he doesn't check the microwave. The smoke alarm
Jars me out of my worries and brings me back to the stove.
Our dinner is soot. I look to the table. His eyes meet
Mine. 'What do you have?' he asks. I rummage through my cupboard.
'Not much.' He approaches me smiling. 'I can work with that.'

ACATAMIENTO

Ron Hickerson

The world demands attention. Every notification—
Celebrity gossip, political gaffes, likes, shares, and
Comments on your recent posts—feeds the unending loop of
Dopamine and serotonin until you're spent. Every
Cause—war overseas, terror at home, economic ups
and downs, human rights victories and violations—craves
Awareness and activism. Earthly cares are like a
Prism, scattering my view with each facet until I
Lose sight of the sacred in the mundane—the Imago
Dei in every face, the Presence in each interaction,
The Sabbath in every lull. I forget the world's bigger
than the palm of my hand or the strokes of my keyboard, but
Then the light shines through my window, and I turn to look out.
The clouds part and I see the sky for the first time in weeks.

LA CENA DEL CORDERO

Ron Hickerson

At Revelation's end, Babylon's demise is followed by a wedding feast.
As a kid, I hated weddings. The only fun parts were eating the cake I
Eyed for hours and throwing birdseed at the happy couple out of revenge.
But John's reception isn't a staid affair. I caught a glimpse of this supper
To come in a bustling Taqueria, engulfed in celebration's roar, on
A Saturday night. There, I couldn't focus on conversations aimed at me—

I was too busy counting the margarita towers and wishing I had, at
Least ordered a beer. I watched a corner booth of tipsy women smile and
Laugh wildly each time they drained a tower to fill their cups. I heard the clink
Of glasses as parties proposed toasts to birthday guests and downed shots of Mezcal
To warm their bodies against the cold January night. In here, it was the
Tropics. It was a summer happy hour. It was refuge against the work
Week and the loneliness of adult life, where bills and taxes would love nothing
Better than to arrest you and drag you away from your succulent meal. In
Here was rest, found in the marriage supper of a gordita con cachete.

HARMONY

Phyllis Green



GOD GRANT ME . . .

Kelly Moyer

When my husband told me, six months after our wedding, that he didn't have the capacity to love me, I was devastated. After all, I was head-over-heels in my belief that I had found my fairytale. Why, I asked myself, did he choose to marry me? I contemplated leaving, even, for the briefest moment, ending my life.

See, my father, who loved me like every daughter deserves to be loved and cherished, passed away when I was ten years old, leaving me with a mother who never wanted a child and made that abundantly clear in her words and actions. It was as though my soulmate was validating my mother's view that I was unwanted and thus unlovable.

Over the next several months, I shed buckets of tears. My husband explained that there was no reason for me to be hurt. His sharing his inability to love me was merely honoring my boundless capacity to give. I tried my best to find solace in his explanation. Certainly, people have different ways of loving, but to not feel love? Well, in my mind, that's a different story.

For a time, I tried to rein in my affection, to opt for serving processed foods rather than preparing home-cooked meals or declining social engagements and outings; but, I found that harboring bitterness simply does not suit me. Even if it's not reciprocated, I can't help but to greet the world around me, much less my intimates, with open arms. Maintaining distance only heightens the pain of separation. There's no disputing it. I am happier if I hold fast to my open heart and love without reservation.

My husband's inability to do the same, I came to realize, is not about me. It's about him and whatever he may have encountered earlier in his life. Perhaps, down deep, he does long for closeness. It's just too scary.

With Valentine's Day approaching, I decided to make the most of the occasion and showered my girlfriends, sister-in-law, and neighbors with cards and cookies. It was important that each of them know just how much they meant to me. I also treated myself to a little something—a bracelet inscribed with the Serenity Prayer, a

source of comfort my father had me learn by heart when I was a little girl.

I'm fortunate that my husband treats me kindly and makes sure I have access to healthcare. He encourages me to seek out opportunities to grow creatively and professionally. Of course, I'll always wish he could appreciate the good heart my daddy instilled in me. But, it is what it is. I have come to a place where I am confident I can embrace the life we have together—with a little help from Above.

RAKING LEAVES WITH JESUS

Carolyn Martin

This afternoon I was thinking how remarkable
these sugar maple leaves are in our backyard.
For weeks they floated down in colors so miraculous
I'd fling my rake aside and scoop handfuls up
with my bare hands. I'd squeeze yellows, oranges,
burgundies, trying to grasp their grace and tint.
I almost pinned them down today when He wandered in.

Flannel shirt, faded jeans, sandals impractical
for autumn rain. I looked twice, then twice again.
Clean-shaved face, auburn hair. Nowhere near
how He appears in statues or stained glass.

He was in the neighborhood, He said.
Free time on His hands. Loaves and fishes packed.
His guys sleeping off a wedding feast.
Ever since the news about His mother and fine wine,
He said, invitations multiplied. Anyway, He was loving
one day on His own without arguments about whose kin
He was or where He lived for all those missing years.

He pulled out gardener's gloves, grabbed
my steel-tined rake, and set to work without
so much as a *would you mind?*
We chatted about lilies, birds, mustard seeds;
how He shaped His parables; I, my verse.
I asked if Judas was set up. Was He in love
with Magdalene? What about Lazarus?

I had my doubts, I said. Tales told secondhand
can muddle truth with facts. He didn't say a word.
His eyes advised some things are better left.

In our quiet truce, His piles grew knee-high,
my hands soaked colors in. Before we knew,
the afternoon was on the run so we let loose.
Two raucous kids kicking leaves toward the sky,
freeing them to coat our clothes,
making joyful noise around the yard.

Laughter settling down, we harvested again.
Filled recycling bins. Put our tools away.
He asked could He return when winter storms set in
and handed me His card. Cursive black on lamb's wool white
advertised His mastery of gardens, miracles, snow.
I picked a stray leaf from His hair. Hugged Him
a grateful good-bye. Said I'd call to let Him know.

MY GOD

Jim Burns

My God is not
in a kingdom called heaven,
seated on a golden throne,
issuing blessings and curses
as His mood directs.

He is not an avenging Yahweh.

My God holds
the aqua pink palette
of a sunrise, whose beauty
is a promise of rebirth.

My God is in
the song of birds,
tiny heralds that announce
the new day.

My God is in the newborn,
tabulae rasae
holding the power
to someday mold the world
in hands now incapable
of grasping.

My God is in my dog
greeting me at the door,
her tail a frenetic metronome
counting beats of
the song of love.

My God is in the touch of
my wife's hand,
hovering like a butterfly,
softly alighting on mine,

flitting away always with
the promise of return.

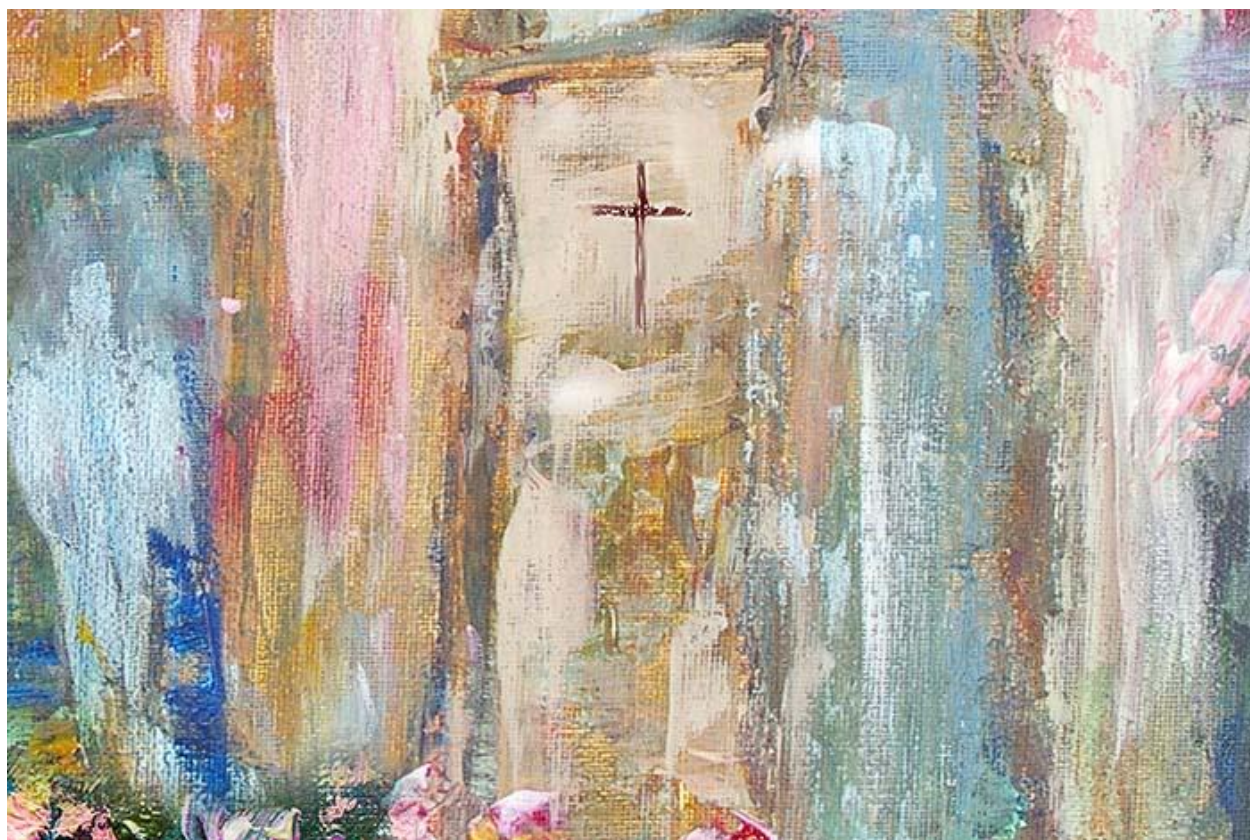
My God is in
soft spring showers
on the roof,
a gentle mother
rocking me to sleep
and providing nourishment
to the wildflowers
whose colors celebrate

His largesse.

My God
surrounds us,
envelops us,
and is in
us all
if only we
seek Him.

ANGEL IN THE CHURCH

June Jameson



KEEPING WATCH

Angela Hoffman

This eve a flock of sheep has wandered
out of their barn all worn into the fenced pasture
frozen, still, silent
keeping watch, it seems.

Their breath hangs in the air, gentle.

The night is wrapped in fleece
as snow falls, tender mild;
a peaceful pastoral postcard
black and white, holy, bright.

O wonder. Look

at the way they stop, stand, eyes wide
lifting their lowly heads, looking up
seeing what we don't see
knowing something more, impossible to ignore
something that insists they pay attention
something we miss, with our eyes closed shut.

THE RETURN

Angela Hoffman

~ After Mary Oliver ~

When I went back to my window
none of it had gone away.
Trash receptacles still lined the street
on which Amazon trucks drop their deliveries
on front stoops in yards that mirror each other
with the same perfect grass
under the sky steeping an earl gray tea
the hum of the highway
and an almost-rain.

Where is the sea with her salted waves, soft faced shells
countries of mockingbirds, swans and dunes
the book-eating pond with the pink-tongued goose?
Where is my song? Where is God all delicate?
I must learn to say grace
drink from the palm of my hand.

THE EPIPHANY OF THREES: THE VISIT, THE MIRACLE, THE BAPTISM

Angela Hoffman

~ After Robert Frost's Acquainted With the Night ~

I have become acquainted with the night.
Thoughts careen like bats in my mind, all wings.
In silent rooms, lonely days without light

I get lost, turned around with mundane things.
I look for stories written in the stars
I fear change, fear that I'm more, I'm nothing.

If I stay long enough I find my heart.
In simple, serendipitous visits
the ordinary turns to wine in jars.

These baptismal moments of sublime gift
reveal a divine manifestation.
The darkness lifts. I'm no longer adrift.

Nothing changes, yet I have come undone.
There's a theophany of three in One.

AS THE LIFETIME OF OF A TREE

Henrietta DuCap

~ Isaiah 65:22 ~

At the confluence of four streams
The tree's fruit grows ripe
Until something
Whispers in the leaves.

Visitors dine
Beneath the terebinth,
Its bark gnarled
As the laughing face of the woman in the tent.

Seven hundred rings
Circle the shoot
That springs yellow-green
From the stump.

At the base of the tree,
Gamblers whisper in afternoon darkness.
In a place of no night, twelve fruits nestle
Among healing leaves.

SPHERES

Henrietta DuCap

We moved in our spheres, constant like constellations
We mapped and consulted. The planets among them played,
Turned, and spun, never touching.

Then we beheld the King's Star strung
Along a line of heavenly bodies—Jupiter over Judea,
Announcing the conception of a King.

Our gifts glimmered in the courts of Jerusalem,
And caught the eyes of desert robbers
As our robes juxtaposed with Bethlehem's sand.

Surely we journeyed in circles, orbiting
Our destination. But it was there the pillar rested—
A star that our charts did not describe.

In a small house, mother and child sat singing.
When they touched, we did not need numbers to know
That heaven had touched Earth.

RUACH

Henrietta DuCap

A strange wind whistled,
Filling each of my ears
But leaving room for the words:
“My soul magnifies the Lord.”

As pain overtook me, his cries
Came through the night, powerful as God.
Between silent breaths as we fled in the dark
I pondered the song in my heart.

I shouted out his name in the crowds,
Followed his rising voice
That twined with the Torah words.
I worried for the guests, then tasted the wine.

I sat beneath him in tears and blood.
The song seemed dead until
The garden in the cool of the third day.
He came like wind through a closed door.

“My soul magnifies the Lord.”
My breath carried on the great gust
As the Spirit overshadowed me—
Once more.

GALILEE

June Jameson



ON THE WATER

Ariana D. Den Bleyker

~ *Matthew 14: 22-36* ~

& as I alone, surrounded by hills in the darkness, struggle against the water, boat pitching at 3 a.m. in the midnight blue & when the winds pick up & the dark water rises, *Fear not* becoming the most imperative comfort in this wild, untamed life, my basic biology betrays me: racing heart, sweat, breathlessness, a brokenness devoid of God—me, over my head in this world, terrified in the turbulence, the danger despite Christ perpetually moving toward me. & for a moment, I step out in faith, dazzled out of doubt for a beautiful, flickering instant until I stumble into the darkness until I pull my eyes from Him & drown in all the what-ifs leaving me flailing again & again & again. But when He meets me, catches me, & I am left shivering in perfect stillness, mine is the boat He climbs into. & I will stare into His eyes, a little bit of Peter inside me, & I will walk on water.

THE DIFFERENCE OF SOUNDS

Desmond Kon

“A beautiful homily, a genuine sermon must begin with the first proclamation, with the proclamation of salvation. There is nothing more solid, deep and sure than this proclamation. Then you have to do catechesis.” ~ Pope Francis

What did I think to myself
that last morning,
that last morning I remember
as if a faraway wedge
of wharfage?

Sound feels like that today.

Sounds feel,
like that day—do they really,
or did that just sound right?

To position a line,
placement
and placemat on page.

Sound.

Its interiority
a kind of evanescence,
according to another book
already open to an opportune page.

Sound—
what manner of conversation

is its conversation
with eternal time?

The homily has started its litany of sounds.

This morning, as with each morning, respite of consolations.

A REFERENCE POINT

Desmond Kon

Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest.

~ Matthew 11:28

I kiss the top of my holy bible, lips against leather, along edge.

I am writing again, and the squall has settled.

Into restful night.

Oh, the silence. The breathless, the stormless.

The pastoral is writing itself out, like an open field.

Did it state atonement,
as if already steadied and preparatory?

(Yes, I said *atonement*, the second life of penance.)

Yes, yes.

A promise repeated so many times
—in admonition, at times, to make stark.

Like stature, of holy relic.

A reminder suggested, to self and story.

THE BAPTISM OF CHRIST

Sarah Law

From a throng – the heat and sweat
exacerbating all their inner grime –

a man, baptising. His rough-cut
sunburnt words a contrast with the cool

of Jordan water. The plunge to your knees,
the spill and pour of ritual's release,

brief peace soaks you; dries, forsakes you.
Something or someone must save you.

John refuses. Not your guru.
raw rejection courses through you. Then

all of it's falling away. Only the sky, cerulean,
open. Only the face of the One, chosen.

A VOICE FROM HEAVEN SAID

Sarah Law

This is my beloved son, in whom I am well pleased.

This is my beloved son, in whom I am well.

This is my beloved son, in whom I am.

with whom, and

This is my beloved son, in whom

and through whom

This is my beloved son,

This is my beloved.

This is my *body*

This is —

This.

THE CROSS OF LIFE

June Jameson



WE DON'T HAVE ANYTHING LIKE THIS IN PHILADELPHIA

Carter Davidson

We arrived in San Giovanni Rotondo as dusk was dawning. On the way up the steep and winding hill that led into the small town, a car insisted on speeding past our bus, nearly causing a collision that would have almost certainly killed everyone involved. Italians. We had spent the previous few days in Rome, and this town had virtually nothing in common with the capital city. While The Eternal City was metropolitan, important, and hazy, the small southern town that Padre Pio called home for much of his life was rural, charming, and breezy. The drive up reminded me of Pennsylvania's farmland in some ways. A prettier picture, perhaps, but reminiscent nevertheless. Our hotel was luxurious, and seemed to be one of the nicer inns in a town dedicated to Padre Pio, gift shops, and hotels in that order. To this day, I find the European insistence on having two bad toilets in the bathroom, as opposed to the American standard of having a single good toilet, puzzling and plain weird. Seems a waste. As ever in Italy, the dinner was pleasant, and so was the wine.

Likely due to the fact that I was over twice as young as any of my fellow pilgrims, they found it surprising when I mentioned how fond I am of the films of John Wayne during dinner. More so, they were particularly surprised when I broke into an off key rendition of "My Rifle, My Pony, and Me" from *Rio Bravo*. (I may have undersold just how pleasant the wine was in the previous paragraph. In the movie the song was sung by Dean Martin, and to be fair, he was almost certainly drunker on set than I was on this pilgrimage to the tombs of various saints.)

The next day, after an impromptu confession in the far corner of the hotel lobby, I told Father Rick that I was discerning a Franciscan vocation, but did not want to make a "thing of it" with the group. It is strange, for two years prior to my pilgrimage I had no doubt that I was being called to the priesthood, but around that time I began to feel like I could do more good as a layman. I may never be as good as I want to be; in fact, I suspect that will likely be the case, but I know that I want to be good.

Later that night, a group of us went up to St. Pio's Shrine to see the procession of the painting of *Our Lady of Grace*. It typically hangs above the altar of the church, but once a year it makes its way around the town, and this was the triumphant return of the painting to its home. This was clearly *the* weekend to be in San Giovanni Rotondo, and there we were, by divine intervention or dumb luck. The procession was led by the fourth police car that I have ever seen in Italy, and a group of EMTs. Our Lady's painting was on a rigging raised above a slow moving vehicle that was trailed by hordes of both pilgrims and locals. What a scene.

Of all of the wonderful things that I have seen in Italy, and Italy has been uniformly wonderful to me, this may well have been the most singularly Italian, and therefore the most singularly wonderful of them all. Thanks be to God that I was able to see this, and much more importantly, that this even exists.

As Our Lady's painting got closer to the church, the masses began singing "Ave Maria," and we were no longer just people who stand with two feet on the ground. We were now floating. This was not real life—or it was the realest life, I have not yet decided. Aurora Borealis had personified and taken the form of a glowing mass of humanity that now surrounded us as we entered into an ethereal dream state. Like a nighttime carnival scene in a black and white movie, or listening to the Sermon on the Mount. Like the sound of the ball hitting your mitt when you're having a catch with your dad, or a prodigal son coming home. Like a first summer love, or forgiving an adulterous woman, or an adulterous man. Like a light rain on a sunny day. Like a best friend, or a beloved disciple. Like the snow that covers the distant mountaintop. Like anything that is close enough to feel but too big to ever understand. Like anything beautiful. Like anything good. Like, oh, like I don't even know what! Like God.

There we were, the pilgrims, awestruck, all of our lives thoroughly affirmed. Eventually, after basking in the humbling beauty that is participating with a multitude of folks simultaneously feeling the Grace of God, which is of course the Grace of knowing that there is a God, and that He is good, I turned to a pilgrim, tears not far from my eyes, frog not far from my throat: "We don't have anything like this in Philadelphia."

"Well, we don't have anything like this in Kansas either," was his immediate

response.

Thank God for people.

THIS STRANGE THING

Stephen R. Clark

Hope is this
strange thing
that fits inside us,
not so neatly,
always straining
against doubt,
shushing fear,
pushing toward
potential joy.

COMING TO REST

Stephen R. Clark

Hospice seems to be happening
at a house near us, behind us.
We moved here a few months ago
and so don't know these neighbors.
A medical supply van was there
delivering a bed and oxygen
the other day. Since then, people
come and leave, linger on the steps,
in the yard, expressions somber.
There is a sense of farewell, of don't go,
of good-bye, of not yet in the scenes.
My heart aches with theirs.
I know this end times routine.
Losing a loved one to death is
never easy, never simple.
Helping them untangle from life
takes courage and faith. Silently,
I watch from a distance
and pray for them comfort
and peace, sooner
rather than later.

Later, a quiet unlit ambulance
visited around 4 AM.
I noticed looking out the window
returning from the bathroom.
Each day since, cars line the sides
of the street in front of the house

bringing those who bring comfort
to the one left behind.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SUN

Abigail Leigh

Some like to bully the English language.

Their complaint:

there is

too many twin-sounding words used

to mean

two un-identical things.

I don't believe it's a coincidence

that when the mouth speaks of the light

of the world:

“sun” and “son”

roll off its tongue the same—

and to an ear's embrace, either

rounded sound

rings with the resonance of both

presence and grace.

God, I cannot see you

but when I feel the warm

sun

rise cradling my face: I look up

and the same love that sent me your

son

burns brazen across the sky, burning

in my heart—

you're there, God

you are

here.

OF LIFE TO COME

Fred Miller

Extol the Lord's striking wonders.
Behold exalted majesties.
Take measure of a blithe bluebird
lifted on currents by His breath.
Eye jaunty poppies in gay praise
as they dance with unfettered joy.

Rejoice over His creations:
the first gasp of a newborn lamb,
a hatching chorus in new song,
the healing goodness of soft rains,
the sight of picturesque sunsets.
May all mankind be of good cheer.

Early morning skies are laden
with His celestial glories.
Gulls pirouette in light-hearted
pavanes of praise and high above,
clouds cavort in playful frolic,
miracles of His handiwork.

Come near, Oh Lord, my guiding light.
Share your vision of life to come.
Grant us wellsprings of joy from your
heart to rejoice in this new day.

THE LORD

Evan Gonzalez

~ originally composed as a song ~

The Lord is my guide
Though I ignore him at times
He won't ignore me

No matter what
I'm saved by the blood.

I'll come back
Like a prodigal
Running home
Running home

I will walk with you
And you with me

O, God of creation thank you for saving me
I have been released
And You are my glory

You are the way
For the hopeless until the earth fades away

O, You are my glory

O You are the way
For the hopeless until the earth fades
away

O, all you people on earth and below
Hallelujah
The king has come
to wash us

And behold Jesus
The son of the Most High and His equal

He is my glory
And He is the way
For the hopeless until the earth fades
away

O, I'll walk with you
I'll walk with you
And you with me

O, Jesus
You are the one who saves
From sin and darkness

And who sets me free,
You're the only one who can

You take away my fears of all but God

O, take away my fear
of all but You, Lord

CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

Ariana D. Den Bleyker is a Pittsburgh native currently residing in New York's Hudson Valley where she is a wife and mother of two. When she's not writing, she's spending time with her family and every once in a while sleeps. She is the author of three collections and twenty chapbooks, among others. She is the founder and publisher of ELJ Editions, Ltd., a 501(c)(3) literary nonprofit. She currently serves as a Deacon on her church's consistory. She hopes you'll fall in love with her words.

Jim Burns was born and raised in rural Indiana and now lives in Jacksonville, Florida. He spent most of his working life as a librarian and turned to poetry a few years after retirement in an effort to keep his mind active.

Stephen R. Clark is a writer who lives in Lansdale, PA with his wife, BethAnn, and their two rescue cats, Watson and Sherlock. His website is www.StephenRayClark.com. He is a member of the Evangelical Press Association and a regular contributor to the Christian Freelance Writers Network blog (<https://christianfreelancewritersnetwork.wordpress.com/>). He walked on fire. Once.

Carter Davidson was born in Pennsylvania in 1990. After spending much of his life simply floating around, he converted to Catholicism in his early thirties, for which he is eternally grateful. When he is not writing he enjoys reading, watching black and white movies, and travelling. He lives in Philadelphia.

Henrietta DuCap earned her BA in Creative Writing from Cornerstone University. She also studied Children's Literature for a term at the University of Oxford. Her work has appeared in *The Makeshift Review*, *Keys for Kids*, *Ekstasis*, *Exhale*, and *The Agape Review*. She lives in Michigan with her husband and baby girl.

Peter Gorham lives, works, sails, and surfs in Honolulu, Hawaii. As an undergraduate at UC Irvine in California he studied poetry and later physics, and now teaches physics as a professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Allison Grayhurst is a member of the League of Canadian Poets. Five times nominated for “Best of the Net,” she has over 1375 poems published in over 525 international journals. She has 25 published books of poetry and 6 chapbooks. She lives in Toronto with her family. She also sculpts.

Phyllis Green is an author, playwright, and artist. Her art can be found at ArLiJo 123, Gulf Stream, Cinematic Codes Review, Superpresent, Paper Dragon, Midwest Zen, I 70 Review, Talking River, and other journals.

Ron Hickerson works in higher education where he helps students navigate the murky waters of academia. When he’s not in his office, you can find him wandering around campus, looking for the oldest trees. His previous works can be found in *The Clayjar Review* and *Foreshadow*.

Angela Hoffman’s poetry collections include *Resurrection Lily* (Kelsay Books, 2022) and *Olly Olly Oxen Free* (forthcoming, Kelsay Books, 2023). She placed third in the WFOP Kay Saunders Memorial Emerging Poet in 2022. She has written a poem a day since the start of the pandemic. Angela lives in rural Wisconsin.

June Jameson’s portraits succeed in bringing forth the truth and beauty of the human figure, while blending with the ethereal as evidenced by her breathtaking pieces that reside in churches and private collections throughout the United States and Europe. Several of her original paintings are currently represented by the Sacred Art Gallery (Arizona.) Jameson’s breakout contemporary Christian works have sold thousands of copies and have been featured in art magazines such as Redeemer’s Heart and licensed for several book covers. Jameson pulls from contemporary figurative and impressionistic styles along with the use of bold, bright colors influenced by the aesthetic of her beloved home state of Florida to form truly unique and meaningful pieces of modern Christian art.

Desmond Francis Xavier Kon Zhicheng-Mingdé (b. 1971) is an author from Singapore. He loves reading theology and poetry. He teaches creative writing at Nanyang Technological University. He can be found at: desmondkon.com

Sarah Law lives in Norwich, UK, and is a tutor, poet and editor of *Amethyst Review*. Her novel, *Sketches from a Sunlit Heaven*, was published by Wipf and Stock in 2022.

Abigail Leigh is a 28 year-old harpist and poet from Oregon. As a self-proclaimed paradox, both a creative and analytical being, she draws inspiration from life's dichotomies: the belief that light and darkness, growth and decay, and joy and sorrow travel in tandem. Every season has a story to tell, and she writes because she is committed to unveiling the truth from learned experiences. Her poetry has been published in Darling Magazine, Black Fox Literary Magazine, Equinox Biannual Journal, Clayjar Review, Foreshadow Magazine, Kosmeo Magazine, Yours Poetically, and Wingless Dreamer Publisher (Winner of their winter poetry contest and their poetry on life contest.)

From associate professor of English to management trainer to retiree, **Carolyn Martin** is a lover of gardening and snorkeling, feral cats and backyard birds, writing and photography. Her poems have appeared in more than 175 journals throughout North America, Australia, and the UK. For more: www.carolynmartinpoet.com.

Fred Miller, a California writer and author of "My L.A., Poems by Fred Miller", has penned over one hundred poems and stories that have appeared in publications around the world over the past ten years. Many may be found on his blog: <https://pookah1943.wordpress.com>

Kelly Moyer can often be found wandering the mountains of North Carolina, where she resides with her husband and two philosopher kittens, Simone and Jean-Paul.

