



*The Windhover*

# The Windhover

23.2

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## JOHN C. MANNONE

### *Echinoderms*

Alone, a sea cucumber audiences  
an unfolding drama in peristaltic applause,  
undulates on the offstage sand.

It doesn't know it will  
soon become very popular itself  
in an Asian soup.

A starfish, surfed to the shore by waves,  
is plucked-out of its own universe  
and made a souvenir—ten bucks  
to sate some impulse-driven purchase  
for a kid the starfish thinks is god.

A god who had resurrected it  
to air-dried stone hardness.

A nearby brittle star wonders why.  
Itself too fragile to help,  
wants to offer a hand, arm.  
Ironically, its arm regeneration potential  
may be connected to understanding  
neurodegenerative diseases in humans.

Sea urchins merely quill the coral,  
prick sand, bleed salt while alive  
before their thorns fall off.

Sand dollars, bleached-white eucharists,  
are simply tossed  
in an offering basket.



Brown-bristled sea biscuits,  
puffed-up like bread,  
with the fishes also in a basket,  
    dried wheat-white  
    big as catheads  
rattling with little bones  
and granules sifting out from a hole  
where its mouth used to be  
    left gaping in the sand,  
praying for the sun to go down  
into the wine-colored sea:  
    a baptism,  
its light streaking the water as oil,  
anointing ocean.

The truth about echinoderms  
is their five-fold symmetry.

Even for Silurian crinoids—  
    prehistoric sea lilies  
    gilded in limestone.  
Every one of its atoms replaced  
with sand, stems encased in hardened tombs:  
    shattered wampum beads—some pressed  
    pupate in shape under weight of time,  
    but the flies had long since been gone.

And I, with two arms, two legs, head,  
a different five-fold symmetry,  
what will my worth be?

## BRODIE LOWE

### *Muddy Water*

A ruby-throated hummingbird darted through the air in a tornado of frenzied wings, encircling a red blown glass feeder half-full of sugar water that dangled on a bent clothes hanger from the front porch's exposed truss. A few feet away, Jenay gently toed the wood decking beneath her, rocking the white antique wicker chair that she sat on, staring at the flying creature in wonderment. It had emerged from a line of shade-throwing trees, zigzagged across the Nottely River that ran in front of her tin roof cabin, and stopped when it discovered that her porch offered a seemingly endless pool of nectar. She took in its frantic countenance as it fluttered to and fro like a veteran barber's scissors around a head of hair. It almost came across as desperate and rushed, but its beauty reminded her of the pretty thing of ink that ran down her leg.

The tattoo needle had first touched her when she had entered a dimly lit parlor in Black Mountain, just after graduating from Warren Wilson College with her mathematics degree. It had started as an eye. "Just the eyeball. Make it look...*hungry*," she had told the old man who wore bifocals and a white beard that fell over a black diamond plate leather vest covered in patches of eagles in mid-flight and banners of cautionary quotes that told people to watch where they step around him. He had etched a predatory eye of black ink just above her right hip bone.

Later, after she'd left the mountains for the city and graduated from UNC Charlotte with her master's degree in Applied Math and returned to the mountains, having snagged the coveted job teaching at Montreat College, she revisited the same parlor and requested a peacock's head to grow around the eye. And four years after that, she returned again and asked for the rest of the bird's body to take form on her skin. "This time, make it colorful," she told the old man who had grown older and senile by then. By the time she was twenty-nine, the peacock—in all its poised majesty—was completed, its beaked head resting above her hip, its neck choked by panty line, bulrushes of feathers gliding along her outer thigh in a kaleidoscopic blast of color, the tips touching just above the lateral side of her knee.

When she reached sixty, she had to go back to the parlor in Buncombe County and get it touched up, this time by a younger artist (the old one had

passed away), and he added a few more wings and more purples and greens. Now, well into her seventies, retired from teaching college, she'd stare at the tattoo in the thinly framed floor mirror that was sticky from years of Rave hairspray. She beheld the spectacle of its loveliness and its air of superiority. She had marveled at it through the years in hotels' morning lights in different states that she visited on trips where she lectured about the beauty and truth in mathematics, complex analysis, and linear dynamical systems.

She was smart and she'd debate whoever crossed her path just to prove to them that she knew more. That she would *always* know more. And she liked to see them squirm in their lack of knowledge. She didn't care about throwing pearls before swine. She cared about the way it made her feel. It made her feel above it all. And it made her feel instantly victorious. It was addictive.

She sipped black coffee from a handmade mug and bit down on leftover grounds that had found their way through the strainer. That's when she heard the gravel crunch beneath heavy, unsteady feet not but fifteen yards away.

The preacher came up on her like the mountain lion had when it snuck up behind her and her friends on a hiking trip along the Tuckasegee River when she was still studying for her undergrad. It hadn't wanted any food; it just wanted to stare at her and see what she was made of until it heard something more interesting scamper somewhere else in the woods. But the preacher looked as if he had something on his mind, something on the tip of his tongue. His prowl was purposeful.

He marched across her front yard, carrying a glass dish covered in crooked mountain ranges of aluminum foil. She yelled at him to watch his step and told him that he must be lost. "I just watered that," she said as he walked over her lawn. In truth, it had rained the night before. "Those steps are apt to collapse," she warned. In truth, it was only a matter of time before those wooden stairs that led up to the side of the porch would fall in and break the ankle of whoever dared invade her haven.

"Evening," the preacher said through a smile of yellow teeth, nodding at making her acquaintance.

"Where'd you come from?" she asked.

"Up over that hill over there," he said, throwing a hitchhiker thumb over his shoulder at a rising road of gravel that disappeared into a pinhead, engulfed by endless groupings of sugar maples enveloped in matrimonial harmony with overrun kudzu.

"Where's your army of holy rollers?"

“Ain’t got no army.”

“Well, that’s what the Lord called ’em. An army. They marched around Jericho ’til the walls came down.” She paused. “With trumpets.”

“That’s a band, miss. Not an army.”

“One hell of a band, I’d say.”

“I just came to...”

“What do you think became of those people, preacher?”

“What people?”

“The ones that played those trumpets like that. Bet those things were louder than Jon Bon Jovi and Louis Armstrong and Woody Shaw combined. You know, to bring down walls like that. Bet they thought they was something else. Hell, could’ve had a record deal if they lived in today’s world.”

“Well, I don’t know about all that.”

“Well, you oughta. You’re a pastor, aren’t you? Read your Bible like you should?”

Feeling challenged, he said “Ram’s horns. They were ram’s horns. Not trumpets. Not like we know them. Not like how Armstrong knew ’em.”

“Now, who in their right mind would ever think to pucker up their lips to a ram’s horn? Who was the first knucklehead to ever do that? ’Bout as crazy as the first perve to ever squeeze a cow’s udder and find out that there was milk inside.”

“I’m helping out Our Lady’s Helping Hands from the church today and...”

“I didn’t catch your name. I mean, I seen you out and about. Seen you shopping at Save-A-Lot. Overheard conversations with you and some people in the aisles. They call you preacher or pastor or whatever. But I ain’t ever catch your name.”

There was a long pause as the pastor wiped his sweaty brow in the humidity with the sleeve of his dress shirt. “Clayton.”

“You going to ask me mine?”

“Jenay,” Clayton said.

“Well, I’ll be. ‘And. He. Shall. Know ye. By name.’”

“It’s not like that.”

“Then what is it?”

“We’ve had some concerned folk down at the church. Said they was your cousins. Said you wasn’t returning no phone calls. Told us where you lived. And given your predicament,” he said, scanning her slouched posture, plastic tubes slithering out of her nostrils and cascading to the ground beside her in coils

before disappearing into an oxygen tank that looked like it had been dragged up a mountain and back down again. “They’re worried for you.”

“You park your beat-up church van down the road, and you and your flock scatter like ants down this side of the mountain with food that’s probably been cooked with unclean hands and then point out my maladies?”

“I’m checking in on their behalf. That’s all.”

“Lot of nerve.”

“They made you this,” he said, balancing the dish in his right hand and peeling back the aluminum foil, condensation running down its underside, with the other hand. “Green bean casserole.”

“Throw it out.”

“They put a lot of work into it.”

“I ain’t eating that.”

“I’m putting it here,” he said as he placed the dish beside a crawling ladybug on the cracked railing. “If you change your mind...”

“I won’t.”

“If you don’t want it, give it to one of your neighbors.”

“Neighbors? They’re about fifty yards in either direction.” If her body wasn’t so stiff, she would’ve accented that remark with crossed arms, pointing right and left like Oz’s Scarecrow. “You think this burden of a body will allow me to do that?”

“I’ll be on my way. You have a good day.” He turned around and descended the stairs.

“Don’t come back,” she said. “And tell them relatives of mine that I’m just fine!” she yelled out as he started across the yard. “They don’t even share my last name! And stay off my grass!”

After he’d gone away, Jenay spent the rest of the morning watching people of all ages paddle forest green canoes and float on black inner tubes as they held on to cans of beer and thermoses stemming with colorful straws. Couples held hands as they went down the river in front of her. She always liked to see that kind of happiness and tranquility, a view of the world so heavily filtered in vacation and relaxation that she didn’t want to look away. It reminded her of when she was a kid, visiting her grandma on that river in the summers, pulling crawdad traps out of cloudy water, cicadas singing at high-pitch, her father and mother sitting in lounge chairs on the side of the bank warning her to watch out for copperheads and water moccasins. One time, she saw a snake, and it had made her skin crawl. Just the sight of it gave her nightmares, and it took a

full week for her to even want to go back out into the river. She'd spend hours standing waist deep in the river, pulling up rusted coins and river rocks, looking for something unreal. She felt like making little discoveries added to her stature and credibility as a human being. It made her feel important. It made her feel like a true explorer. And part of her wondered what the mountains had become and who she had become. It was as if the summation of time away from that river over the years pulled at her psyche and eroded her innocence. Getting an education, teaching students, and grading papers at work had chipped away at the instinctual curiosity of nature that one possesses as a child. She envied those people that came from the cities and small towns as they floated down the river and saw trees and birds in the region for the first time.

She thought of the Appalachian Mountains and the wooden-relief-carved landscape of that very house that she now lived in. It had been nailed up on the wall next to the kitchen table and collected dust along its contours. She thought of the portraits of family members from generation after generation that lined the hall that she passed by every night on the way to bed. She had all these reminders of who she once was, but seemed to pass by them like they were ghosts. Familiarity bred contempt and then forgetfulness.

Two Sundays later, after Jenay guzzled down her morning's worth of black coffee, she turned on the Magnavox television, flicked through the channels and landed on a movie that she'd never seen before where Alan Rickman looked genuinely shocked in a slow-mo freefall from high up on a building, papers fluttering through the air beside him like butterflies. After he hit the street below, a persecuted man, covered in blood, embraced his lover in exhaustion. "Well, that just about ruined the whole movie for me," she said under her breath as she searched the channels and landed on a rerun of *Murder, She Wrote*.

Then she heard the singing.

She wheeled her oxygen tank out onto the front porch and saw them all waist deep in the river. They wore white choir robes and sang about never forgetting about the old country church and shouting in the aisles. And at the helm of the shenanigans was Clayton. He placed a congratulatory hand on the shoulder of one woman who looked like she had just come up out of the water, smiling and wiping running mascara off her cheeks with open hands. The others, more than a dozen of them, raised and clapped hands.

"Get out of my river!" Jenay yelled at them.

Clayton just waved at her. Waved for her to come on down that way and join them. They turned to the loud voice on the front porch as if Jenay had said

“Hey, ya’ll! Let me come join you.” They smiled and waved her over, too. She recognized some of them to be her relatives.

“Get your asses out of my river!” Jenay screamed. “You’re blocking my view!”

They ignored her as Clayton welcomed another from the robed congregation near him. The group quieted and he spoke calmly.

Jenay’s blood boiled over, and she banged on the wooden railing in front of her. She grabbed hold of the bird feeder and threw it into her yard, shattering it. “You bunch of pests!”

They would not listen to her venomous shouts of anger as Clayton dunked another woman, baptizing her with another round of applause.

Jenay hobbled down the stairs, crossed the yard and speed walked to the bank, carrying her oxygen tank the whole way. “Ya’ll don’t come out of there, I’m coming in for each and every one of you.”

“We’re not breaking any laws here,” Clayton said.

“This is my river.”

“People come up and down this thing all the time, Jenay.”

“I don’t want you getting in their way.”

“We’re not in nobody’s way,” Clayton said.

“Jenay! So good to see you! Come on down here. Water’s not too cold,” said a middle-aged man that looked like a bloated version of her cousin she and her family used to visit over the holidays. The years hadn’t been kind to him.

“Honey, why don’t you calm down some,” another voice said. Jenay recognized it and noticed that it had come from the woman who had just been baptized—Rhonda, Jenay’s deceased sister’s lifelong friend.

“All right! That’s it! I’m coming in,” Jenay said as she yanked the oxygen tubes from her nostrils and pushed the the oxygen tank to the thick grass at the bank’s edge.

She walked lamely and hobbled like a red hen into the calm, cool water. She started pushing at them, pulling on their robes, creating a whirlpool of anger. They defensively evaded her attacks and stepped back a few feet.

Then a sharp pain shot all the way through her body when her big toe found a lost and forgotten fish hook along the riverbed as it dug into her flesh without any intention of letting go. She instinctively picked up her foot and held on to it with both hands, breathing through gritted teeth, teetering and falling on her left side in the water like a spinning top finally coming to rest. That’s when the splashing grew panicky.

She brawled and thrashed in the water, blood trailing in a wispy cloud of red from the fish hook's ironclad grip on her toe, as she pushed away the surrounding people, the water lapping the shores of her chin and mouth. Her legs kicked and the peacock peeked out of her dress and the river for everyone to see, its proud colors endlessly being grabbed at and held down by all that muddy water. Rhonda reached for her desperately, but Jenay's frantic foot kicked her in the side and knocked the breath out of her. As Rhonda bent over in pain, the relentless sun glinted off a swaying cross necklace around her neck and burned bright into Jenay's wild eyes. She gave up fighting for oxygen and floated away from the group, her breath catching in her chest, her weary body plunging wholly beneath the surface, falling sluggishly in the murky wake as tiny white bubbles of air floated to the top like butterflies.



## LAURA WANG

### *Prayer Ghazal*

*Engine against th' Almighty, sinner's tow'r...*  
—George Herbert, “Prayer (I)”

Do spirits have flesh ears? Can yours perceive me now?  
My knees split on the stones, and will you leave me now?

So long I've sought thee sorrowing. Stored up my tears.  
Ventured at nightfall: “This time he'll relieve me.” Now,

silence the choirs; pinch shut the little birds' beaks.  
(Even the rain's silver percussions peeve me now.)

I'll make my bed in hell, the deep surrounding me—  
your veil of clouds can't possibly bereave me now.

A serpent's bit your bride. And like Eurydice  
I wait, stone-mover, wishing you'd retrieve me now;

and if you cannot come—or if you'd lose me twice—  
I'd count it kind for you to undeceive me now.

Eve's daughter has outgrown her mother, whose womb closed  
long ago; you alone can reconceive me now.

You say: How long, Laura, will you fire this *Engine*  
*against th' Almighty*? When will you relieve me? *Now*?

## REINE DUGAS

### *How to Remember*

It's Tuesday, 11:35 a.m., and I'm late for lunch with Dad again. We've been meeting once a week for coffee or lunch for about twenty years now. We've always been very close.

But when I arrive, there he sits at the table, looking like a schoolboy almost, hands clasped in front of him, shoulders back, looking around the room with a wide-eyed gaze. He's become more fragile as he's aged—not as corporeal in a way, his body a little transparent, eyes kind of vague. A figment of his younger self. But when he sees me, his face lights up and his smile is true, and for a short while, it seems as though time has stopped and he is the same as he ever was.

"Buon giorno," he says, still hanging on to the smattering of Italian we learned from our many trips to Italy.

"Ciao, Pops," I lean in to kiss both of his stubbly cheeks.

A reed-thin waitress comes by, and before she says a word, my father says, without even a greeting, "Two Pad Thais, two iced teas." He does this more often, I notice, anxious to say what he's thinking, regardless of the natural ebb and flow of conversation.

"What are you up to today?" I ask.

He pulls out his to do list, written in pencil on a yellow legal pad—something he's always done, as long as I can remember. A perpetual list-maker, like me, he writes his list out every morning to keep track of his errands, giving structure to his day.

"Twenty one things—done. All before lunch," he says proudly.

"I guess that's easy to do when you're up at 3 a.m.," I joke.

"Tell me about it," he laughs and rubs his face. "You never get used to it, getting up early. Damn insomnia. Runs in our family, so you better watch it..."

"Don't even air that! I'm good so far."

He gives me a look as if to say, not for long. "I worked on my studio yesterday," he says instead.

He's got a small studio in the backyard where he works on his art and has been updating it for longer than it seems he should be. He seems to be painting less and less, I've noticed. Who knows exactly what he does back there. Paints sometimes. Putters around, I suppose. Organizes brushes and canvases. Labels drawers. Perhaps he feels safe there in that space of his own.

“When’s it going to be done?”

“Right now I’m tiling the floor. I still have to do the border, but the middle is almost done. It’s a dollar sign,” he laughs. “And now I’ve got the two lines going down the middle in instead of just one. Thanks to your friend Nancy, who had to point that out when she was over. Critics, I’m surrounded by critics! So the floor’s black with the white dollar sign.” He grins, sketching it out on the tablet. “I like it.”

Like most artists, he loves painting more than the actual selling. So he decided to make the floor a dollar sign as a joke but also to remind himself to work on selling a little bit more. I’ve heard this story and the description a dozen times now, but I still listen.

He tells me about some new memory medication he’s ordered, because, you see, he is aware that he’s becoming more forgetful and is fighting it in his own way. “Saw it on TV. Costs \$250 for a year’s supply! I don’t know what it’s called, but I think it’s working. If I remember to take it.” He laughs. “I don’t feel like I’m repeating myself as much anyway.”

I watch him eat his lunch; he does the same thing every time. Counts the shrimp to make sure there are three, then cuts them into small pieces so he can have lots of bites with the noodles. “It’s always good,” he says, as he always does.

When the bill comes, maybe fifteen minutes later, he says, “I worked on my studio yesterday.” He smiles. “I’m tiling the floor. I’ve still got to do the border, but the middle is almost done.”

He takes the legal pad, flips to a new page, not noticing the dollar sign he drew only minutes ago. “It’s a dollar sign.” He sketches it out again. “Now I have two lines going down the middle instead of one. Nancy showed me that. Critics! But it’s black and white. Almost done.” He nods.

“That sounds great, Dad,” I rub his arm.

As I get into my car, he calls out from his, “Come by and see me at the Palmer Street art market next Saturday.”

“OK, will do. Bye!”

“Te amo, ciao,” he yells.

“Te amo, ciao,” I answer.

Before I pull out of the lot, I realize I’ve forgotten which day he told me the art market was—Saturday or Sunday, this weekend or next? Damn. How could it be gone that fast? His words had evaporated. I close my eyes to try to retrace the conversation, to try to recall his words, but no, they were gone. I stare at the Post-it Note on my steering wheel: “Dry cleaning,” it says.

Evaporating thoughts occur a lot lately. Memory lapses, random forgetfulness. Call it what you will, but without being too dramatic, I think I'm starting to lose my mind. Or at least my marbles. Lately, the Post-it Note has become my best friend. Next to the calendar/alarm on my cell phone, the Post-it Note might actually be the greatest invention of all times, if only because it kept me from going completely insane these days.

You see, I forget things a lot. I joke that I have early onset Alzheimer's (which I realize is an awful joke). My mother kindly tells me I'm overloaded or overwhelmed—I don't know exactly which word she used. You have so much going on, she says. And I do. I have my job (English professor, stacks of papers to perpetually grade), a two hour round-trip commute to work, several adjunct classes and tutoring gigs; I'm also a single mom to a sweet boy who also happens to have a disability and needs help with the challenges of school. Throw in a house to maintain and a couple of critters—Cici the cat and Ashley the guinea pig. I'm also a writer when I'm able to be. Yes, I am busy.

But still.

It's pretty bad when I have to write a Post it Note between classes with the word "coffee" on it to remember to stop at the Starbucks when I walk across campus to my next class. Or 'pants' on a note stuck to the bathroom mirror so that in the morning, I'll remember to put my son's uniform pants in the dryer or he'll be going to school either in dry boxers or wet pants. I make lists on Post-it Notes, addendums to lists on different colored notes (by the way, florescent orange are the best—you almost can't miss those), and reminders of all kinds ('change litter box,' 'grade make-up tests,' 'polish nails,' 'no pink, yellow, or blue'—this was the summer I gave up artificial sweeteners).

Then there are the places the notes go. I hope no one else sees these things lying around like markers of my lunacy. My keys are a prime spot to put a reminder note because they are like an extension of my body these days. I've also put these notes in my pockets and in the sunglasses holder of my car. On book covers and coffee cup tops. On the steering wheel, in my bra. On my shirt. On the back of my cell phone, on my laptop. On the front door. On the back door. Doorknobs too. The kitchen counter. The lid of the toilet ("clean bathroom, for God's sake," said that one). At times, my space looks like a cubist nightmare of scribbled-on colored squares.

In addition to this old-fashioned paper-and-pen way to remember, my phone calendar/alarm is in constant use. These cell phone reminders go beyond

the visual—you can set an awful submarine alarm to alert you of an event if need be. Yesterday’s phone reminders included two meetings, three phone calls that I needed to make, and a tutoring appointment. A reminder to return library books, and one to pick up dry cleaning. A reminder to meet my dad for lunch. That was a pretty light day, and there also was a written to-do list, which I write out every morning when I have my coffee, just like Dad does. Yet I still can’t remember the day my father tells me to come see his art show ten minutes after he’s told me.

Maybe Mom is right—I’ve got too much going on, in my world and in my head. Perhaps even partly due to being on my own; I have no one else to remind me, so I have to do it all by myself. Yes, most people would believe that as a good explanation for why my life is being recorded on sticky notes, a pad of paper, and an iPhone app. Only, secretly, I don’t suspect any of that is true.

Secretly, I believe I may have pulled the genetic black dot. In finally acknowledging the possibility that my father has or is getting some kind of dementia, much as his mother and his aunts did before him, I’m also beginning to consider my own possible fate.

Granted, this might never happen, and obsessing about it or berating myself for forgetting things does no good. I recognize that joking or minimizing—even switching the focus to me—is nothing more than a defense mechanism, an unwillingness to acknowledge what’s happening now, an avoidance of the real issue. Which is, I’m broken-hearted that my father may have, probably has, or is on his way to getting Alzheimer’s. We haven’t had him diagnosed yet, but we are about to. The search for a neurologist has begun; Google has become my go-to, arming me with terms like Mild Cognitive Impairment (or MCI), raised homocysteine levels, vascular dementia, and Alzheimer’s warning signs.

Now is the moment, that just-before moment, when I can pretend that things are one way, that I don’t have to face the truth—the reality or sadness of the changes that are about to occur.

From what I’ve learned so far, Alzheimer’s is like a closing window—a gradual mental decline that’s painful enough to experience or witness, and is only compounded when the physical catches up and eventually, the person dies. Of course, like any horrible disease, there are stages to it—seven, in fact, according to my research—and they are as ambiguous and obfuscated as you might imagine. I mean, what’s the real difference between Stage 2 “very mild decline” and Stage 3 “mild decline”? Sifting through the information has been challenging enough and at times, I feel like I’m doing a school paper, so

reluctant am I to connect what I'm discovering to my own father. It's hard to imagine him going through these stages, when I can barely stand seeing him struggle to recall a name or notice when he repeats himself.

Those with the gift of a robust mind don't really understand how important a person's memory is and what it means to lose it. It's something taken for granted, like walking or eating or sleeping.

Remembering.

Doesn't seem so very crucial when you are easily able to do it. But, when it starts to go, you realize all that it entails. Recalling past events is evidence that they ever occurred—proof, validation. So without them, perhaps they never even happened or were only imagined, not real. The act of forgetting small things, though, may be even more painful than losing entire swaths of time. The frustration of walking into a room and not knowing why, when only seconds before, you did. Telling a story about a neighbor and suddenly not being able to recall her name. Knowing you were told what time a doctor's appointment was ten minutes ago and now having no idea. A loss of power is the ultimate feeling because try as you might, there is nothing you can do to retrieve that forgotten piece of information, though you stand stock-still, eyes closed, and send your mind back, with almost Herculean effort, back to the story or circumstance where you might be able to recall that detail. And when you can't, you feel despair and hopelessness at being unable to regain something that was once yours.

My father, who is only beginning to forget, tries to hide his lapses behind a smile or with a sarcastic, self-deprecating comment, but not before I see a look of frustration cross his face at his utter inability to remember. And so I ignore it or make light of it just as he does because it's easier to pretend nothing is wrong. I'll confess to being a little in denial about him for some time now.

He's just getting older, after all. What 74-year-old man remembers *everything*, anyway? When I think about it, really think about it, lots of them probably do. When he calls me for the third time in a day to ask again what time he is supposed to pick me up to bring me to the airport, I make excuses. He must have been busy when I told him the first time, he must not have written it down, he must not have been paying attention when I told him. Anything to deny what I know to be true.

My dad. The most amazing man I know. He is a big man. Or, he used to be—he's smaller these days. But I remember him looking like a bodyguard or a linebacker when I was younger. Tall and heavy, broad shoulders, both

bearded and bald, and unmistakably Italian, or Sicilian as he is quick to share with anyone who asks. In the 1970s and '80s, he had his own business and dressed the part. Nice clothes from a fancy men's store, Jeff's Haberdashery was the name, if I recall. Wide-collared dress shirts, pressed polyester slacks, and European leather loafers. Several gold chains, a big-link bracelet, and a diamond ring set him squarely in the mood of the moment, which was disco. He had an easy smile, was helpful and friendly and always had a story to tell. Sharp, that's how you'd describe him. He was sharp, in the way he looked and the way he thought.

Although there's something softer about him, I still see glimpses of that big man I remember. And he's undoubtedly the most loveable man I know. I'm holding on so tight to him now, today, so I'll remember this person and not the person he will become, the foggy vacant person that Alzheimer's will transform him into. I can't even bear to think of it. And so I choose to remember my father the way he was before he started to forget.

Sherman Alexie wrote, "If you don't like the things you remember, then all you have to do is change the memories. Instead of remembering the bad things, remember what happened immediately before." I'd prefer to remember the just-before moments of my dad. The best moments because they are the ones I'd imagine I'm least likely to forget down the road. Like going with him for my first grown up dinner to a place called Visko's and talking about all the places I wanted to travel. Driving with my family to California every year of my childhood and staying up late into the night to keep my dad company and watch the dark road for rabbits or the sky for shooting stars. Watching with my brother as Dad and Mom disco danced in the kitchen to Donna Summers or Earth, Wind & Fire. Having my own turn dancing with Dad at my wedding Natalie Cole's "Unforgettable." Listening to Andrea Bocelli in Siena's campo one summer night and knowing it was one of the highlights for Dad, a longtime fan, and being grateful that I could witness such pure joy on his face. And there are so many more.

Maybe he won't have Alzheimer's after all; maybe he really is just getting older, and that's all. But if so, I need to remember. What counts right now is preserving who I know my father to be, and if I have to, if it comes down to it, helping him transition gently into this next stage of his life, whatever it is called, with love and humor and grace.

Writing must be part of the answer, I've finally concluded. Just as he writes things down on his tablet, and I write down notes, I'll start writing down

everything that I remember of him from the past and everything we do in the present—I'll write the story of my father so that if I forget, I can remember.

\* \* \*

That night, my son, Jacob, and I are sitting outside on the deck, empty dinner dishes around us and the sound of cicadas winding up as dusk sets in. We are looking hard and trying to find the beginning of the crazy kudzu that winds its way insidiously along the back fence and over trees and bushes. If you don't catch it fast, the vine will take over until it looks like a rainforest right in the middle of New Orleans. I'm amazed that I didn't even notice it starting and here it is, full-blown.

The phone rings and it's Dad.

"Hey, whatcha doing?"

"We just finished eating. Now we're watching weeds grow. What are you up to?" I say.

"I forgot to tell you to come see me at the art market next Saturday. Should be good weather. You and Jacob should come." I start to laugh and feel my son watching me.

"OK, Dad, sounds great. I'm writing it down right now. We'll be there."

"Great! That's it. Good night."

"Night. Love you."

"Love you too."

"What was that?" Jacob asks.

"Wait," I tell him, "gotta put this in my phone." And in a few seconds, I've got my reminder secure and am thinking maybe there's an upside to forgetting after all because those of us who forget actually get to hear things more than once.

"He was calling to tell us about the art market," I tell him.

"Huh? He told us that last time he was over... He really is losing it a little, isn't he?" says my smart teenage son.

"Yes he is, Love, and that's why we need to do the best we can to spend time with him and remember every single thing about him that we can." For a moment, his sweet face looks sad—he loves his grandfather so much. Then he lights up.

"Hey, I know what we can get him for his birthday this year!" He digs in his pocket and pulls out a crumpled-up bright green Post-it Note with his own reminders scrawled on it. "A jumbo pack of these!"

I want to cry but can only reach over and hug him because it's been a good day, and I know that between my son and me and everyone else, we'll record the details of Dad's life so that we can all remember him.



## LAURA REECE HOGAN

### *Movable Feast*

I want to give you the cardinal Christmas ornament  
in the shop, the one with snow-dusted feathers  
and sparkly eyes      also the auburn fox stretched  
in flight flecked with glitter. I want to give you all  
the dishes of the menagerie, prickly hedgehogs,  
shy rabbits, proud zebras with arched backs,  
hummingbirds floating, surprised      also the cups  
rimmed round in shining gold, so that you eat  
and drink of me and my love. I want to pluck  
the birdsong from the morning sky and wrap it  
for you, in swaths of sunlight      festooned in  
silver-edged bands of blue heaven. I want to mix  
honey with lemons cut in tiny tangy pieces  
and give you all the tea      all the teapots also, clay  
and porcelain, and stacks and stacks of hours to savor  
every sweet steeped amber drop. I want to give you  
crimson-draped sugar maples      each still-tender leaf  
flaming with love, alight in the dance of adoring  
your heart. I want to give you all the bowls of fragrant  
prayers, all the fingers clasped in thanksgiving, all  
the vowels of praise      ascending, all the joy in the  
halls of light, and also in the halls of darkness, among  
the little sparrows gazing so faithfully at your cloak of cloud.  
I want to write my life      on a sheet of linen paper  
spill all the notes of my love, from first dawn to dawnless day:  
the pounding lament, the soaring victory, the hushed longing,  
and give it to you.  
But you have already given it all to me.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**CICILY BENNION** is an MFA candidate at Brigham Young University where she studies creative nonfiction. She currently serves as the nonfiction editor for BYU's literary magazine, *Inscape*. Her writing has been published or is forthcoming in *Mount Hope*, *Essay Daily*, and *The Journal*.

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# The Windhover

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