



The Windhover

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Statement from cover artist, Eugenia Sherman Brown:

In December 2015, we got the bad news. My husband had terminal brain cancer. The road ahead looked scary. Years before, after the deaths of my parents, I'd learned of the healing potential of tactile work. Raised in a milieu that elevated the cerebral, I was in midlife before discovering God's redemptive possibilities of creating with my hands.

By the spring of 2018, we knew we did not have much time. While my husband slept in our bedroom, I fashioned and adhered small pieces of glass and stone in my studio in the next room. It was grief work. Across five years, I created a series of four large mosaics grappling with my sorrow, my tangled emotions and God's healing love. The last of the four is *Lord of the Waters*.

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KARA SHROYER

Until the Son Appears

If you asked me, O my son, how your life began, what could I tell you?

If I traced your beginning to words whispered in the dark, to stones piled across the desert, to promises as numerous and remote as the starry night sky, would you have ears to hear? Unlike me, you've never cared for riddles. Your belief—like your father's—feeds on milk and honey, content to obey, to please, even now that you are no longer innocent to the Ungraven One's ways. So I must ask by telling tales, and my answers must birth your questions, though I also thought to lay doubt to rest once you were laid squalling upon my withered breasts. As if seen had come from unseen, as if a riddle had fulfilled a promise, as if a birth could reverse death. As if a boy opening his mother's womb could—by some strange jest—carry his father and mother back to the past.

There, a seed of truth: your life began as laughter.

That day, the day of laughter, I was weaving a cloak for your father from scarlet yarn. The sun burned at its zenith, and I'd grown faint from the heat in the tent. When I stuck my face out a slit between two hanging goatskins for a breath of fresh air, I saw three travelers approaching astride donkeys. Their faces, half-wrapped in rags against the white-hot sun, were set like flint toward our dwelling.

"Abram!" I called.

Barely ten paces away, your father gestured for help to rise from where he sat sighing. Two trained men marched stiffly to his side, their faces aflame and their fingers already reaching for concealed knives. Abram groaned as they pulled him to his feet. I parted the skins as widely as I dared to watch your father hobble into the potent sunshine, praying the visitors would ascribe his weakness to his age and his soldiers' blazing cheeks to the midday heat, rather than to the Ungraven One's most recent whim. Such desert wanderers were often cunning thieves, even spies. If they marked our household unmanned, they'd carry the news of your father's shame to a neighboring warlord in exchange for a share in our spoils. It would matter little that our settlement stretched to the nearby foothills, alive with goat bleats and drum beats.

But they were beggars. Flies swarmed around their donkeys' drooping ears, and I could smell the odor of their skinny bodies from where I stood. They

bore no weapons or wares. Abram bowed and said, “O Lord, do not pass by your servant,” and the three leapt off their beasts as if in unison to return the courtesy.

My fear began to melt as I listened to Abram’s gentle greetings, and I couldn’t help but smile at his steadfastness. Your father’s wealth spoke to his favor with the gods, yet he loved to debase himself, embracing the meanest portion. Another wounded master might have left a steward to entertain such guests, but not Abram. Once he had even gifted green pastures to a young nephew while we languished in the desert. Abram’s presence was like a warm cloak on the shoulders of any stranger. Any moment he would call for the fattened calf to feed these three.

Instead, he rushed back into the tent, his white hair oddly shocked through with the raven-black of his youth, his injury and age somehow abandoned for unsettling joy. I shuddered as he touched a trembling hand to the crown of my head.

“Cakes,” he requested.

“Has the Queen of Heaven herself descended upon us?” I asked.

He laughed and lifted his shoulders in a helpless shrug. Could I blame him? He loved my cakes. And your father had waited years for a word—any word. In his dimming eyes, the flea-bitten three who now reclined in the shade of our great terebinth surely looked like angels.

Maidservants helped me fold three measures of flour into camel’s milk, then cover the dough in hot ash on the hearth to bake. Its sweet fragrance clung to me as I returned to my hiding place behind the skins to eavesdrop on the conversation outside. A slave boy hurried to deliver water, then meat, then my cakes. Abram dismissed him and bent to wash the gnarled feet of the smallest beggar.

“Where is Sarah?” the man asked. His voice, earlier raspy with thirst, now rang as sweet as those of the eunuchs singing in Pharaoh’s harem.

Abram stopped scraping grime off the man’s toes to glance in my direction. My breath caught in my throat. How could it be? Somehow I was looking sixty years into the past. Your father’s skin had completely unwrinkled. His eyes smoldered above a dark beard. I stared into that bygone face, my body humming like a plucked string playing a long-forgotten melody.

“She’s in the tent, Lord.”

“When I return this time next year, Sarah, your wife, will have a son.”

I laughed aloud. A bevy of doves reeled off the oak branches above the

beggar's head. He lifted his gaze as if to trace their flight, but his gaze settled on our dwelling. *He can see me*, I thought, goosebumps crawling up my arms. Impossible. The sun shone full in his face, and I stood well-concealed. But—

“Why are you laughing, Sarah?”

“I'm not,” I said, breathless. “Only tell me: after I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?”

“Is anything too wonderful for El Shaddai?” the beggar asked.

At the Ungraven One's name, the laughter died in my throat, and I fled immediately to the innermost room. Even there, tucked away in near darkness, I could feel the stranger's eyes on me. I shuffled to the water jug, where I broke the reflection of a sour-faced hag into ripples to perform ablutions. I washed my face with shaking hands.

El Shaddai! A name I hated almost as much as I feared it. His jests had not changed in a generation, but I had. My crooked fingers could easily furrow through my thinning hair to stroke the spotty bald beneath. My body shriveled ever closer to the earth, as if I carried a great weight on my back. Any future I might bear had been set in stone long ago.

We were young when the ungraven god's voice first burned your father's ears. El Shaddai commanded that we leave our family and settle the land he would show us.

Our people wept for days, but their tears did not move me. I found Abram's devotion exciting. His pursuit of El Shaddai tangled with passion for me. At night, our limbs intertwined, he whispered that El Shaddai had promised to bless us with offspring more numerous than the sand on the seashore.

“Can you imagine! We'll be parents of an entire nation! You and I, Sarai!”

I had laughed then, too, but it had been the joyful laughter of a young woman whose future seemed as certain as a fixed star. In obedience to El Shaddai's command, we caravanned from Haran to Canaan. When we arrived at Shechem, the Ungraven One promised Abram yet again that he would give this land to our offspring. There, under the oaks, your father built an altar, the first to his god in that place. Together we watched the sparks fly toward the heavens.

“He is pleased,” Abram said after a while.

“How do you know? You've never seen his form.”

He turned to me, face shining as it had on our wedding night when he'd lifted my veil, his eyes lingering on the silk of my hair, the curve of my lips. *My sister, my bride*. A curious jealousy curdled my insides. I wondered what

your father's god might expect of us in return for his promise. Abram and I had already known hunger and drought, the usual signs of divine displeasure. How much worse could El Shaddai's retributions be than those of our household gods, whose clay bodies we had carried with us to Canaan?

Now I crept to the dim corner where Inanna stood enshrined. I had set aside one small cake for my goddess, whose carved body was a pillar that forever bore, cradled, and suckled the earth. Every rhythm of life in the world reflected her abundance: moons fattening bellies, rains nursing the dust, seasons rising and settling. How, then, could the barren one rejoice? I had never known Inanna's ways. As for El Shaddai—year after year the oaks in Shechem shed their leaves and took them up again, but the children he had promised did not come.

Ours was an uneasy peace. We skirted the wars of Canaanite kings, moving ever further into the Negev. Your father's growing prosperity drew constant attention, especially during those lean years. How long before the warlords harassed our nearest relative for ransom, or attempted raids on our settlement? But your father feared something else entirely.

"Listen, my beauty. They will kill me for you."

His terror was so great he ordered the entire household to spread the news abroad that we were "a wealthy Hebrew and his sister." It was only a half-lie, for we were half-siblings, but how would a half-truth protect either of us when the Canaanite kings offered bridewealth rather than war? My questions fell on deaf ears, so I swallowed my husband's fear along with my own as famine starved us toward Egypt.

The closer we inched to the border the more Abram trembled. "Spare my life," he begged. Exhausted, I obeyed and removed my veil. The lie preceded us into the royal city, and the rest unfolded like an elaborate jest. The Egyptians praised me to their princes, and the princes praised me to Pharaoh. I was summoned to court, trailing behind Abram as barefaced as a virgin. The Egyptian king's eye took its fill. He snapped his fingers. Grain, camels, oxen, textiles, spices, and slaves were brought to Abram, and Pharaoh sent me to his harem.

Pharaoh was more than a king; he was a god among his people. But El Shaddai didn't fear Pharaoh. He afflicted the royal house with a plague of boils. The river turned to blood. We escaped by night, skin clean, oxen ponderous under the weight of Pharaoh's gifts, tongues slick with the taste of scarlet. On

the road back to Canaan I collected as many doubts in my heart as stones in my sandals.

We pitched our tents under the oaks near Mamre, at Hebron. Immediately Abram disappeared into the wilderness, returning two days later covered in animal blood and reeking of myrrh and aloe and cassia. He had worn himself out chasing vultures, he marveled, and had fallen into a deep sleep. His face shone as only the Ungraven One could make it, and his great joy only fed my envy.

Blood. There was always blood, yes, dark and warm and alive. El Shaddai required it. But the following moon, I did not bleed. I couldn't believe it. After all this time, would Abram finally lengthen his cords, enlarge the place of his dwelling? I waited until three moons passed before I told him.

He received the news more solemnly than I thought he would, covering his head. "O Lord, our shield," he said. He built an altar, but the wind carried away the fragrance of roasting flesh. My blood never returned, and we never named the phantom between us, the hope I didn't know I still nursed. After that day I could not receive tenderness from my husband. Would that Abram were like other men, who put away their wives for lesser failures.

Outside, jackals were squabbling over bones. Dusk—Abram would have pressed the beggars to remain for the night rather than continuing to the cities. I dreaded facing them, but when I returned to peek through the goat skins, they were nowhere to be seen. I wandered out into the restless twilight. Torches flickered smoke into a lapis-colored sky. Soon the heavens would crowd with stars. Beyond the reach of light, all manner of creatures congregated in the cool of evening: herds snuffling, scorpions scuttling, hyenas chittering. A sickly sweetness, like rotting fruit, scented the back of the wind.

I heard my maidservant's bare feet whispering behind me before she appeared at my elbow, carrying a candle and a comb. Like the scarlet yarn, Hagar had come with us out of Egypt. Fourteen years later she still looked like an innocent child, though of course I knew better. I scowled as she snaked a plump arm around my waist to guide me inside for sleep.

"You smell of goat," I chided. Such remarks usually roiled the girl—she was hopelessly vain—but tonight she remained silent, so I pressed on another bruise. "Abram will have another son."

"Oh, mistress," Hagar whispered, pinking. "Let it be done to me according to your word."

Always she sought my humiliation! I let the bitter words drip like honey off my lips. “Foolish girl,” I said. “Surely you didn’t think you were the only one I’d given to his embrace?”

She shrank away from me, and I dismissed her with a flick of my wrist, careful to keep my eyes off her face. My pity was always a seed for Hagar’s pride. If I did not keep her in her place, she would parade her son Ishmael before me, or worse, peddle her own wares before Abram.

And I would have to ignore it. Or pretend to, at least, for I was the one who had told Abram to lie with her. I had seen him eying her on the road home from Egypt, and not with pity. Even if I couldn’t bear to let him touch me anymore, I could be generous. I could bestow on him the blessing that his cruel god withheld. But as soon as I saw the familiar flush on his cheeks, hatred for Hagar filled my heart. I’d terrorized her, mostly in secret, knowing she would never complain to your father, and that even if she did, he would say nothing. When she fled I felt glad—especially glad that my cruelty would perish along with her in the desert. But a few days later she’d returned, her face glowing. She proclaimed that El Shaddai had seen her, and that she would bear a son for my lord.

So it was Hagar’s son that Abram had cradled with tears in his eyes.

It was for Hagar’s son that Abram fashioned a bow and arrows.

It was for Hagar’s son that Abram built altars, year after year, begging the blessing. El Shaddai had remained silent until Ishmael turned thirteen, when he called your father to a desolate place to proclaim that the promise would only come through my son. Then El Shaddai commanded your father to cut off his foreskin, his and that of every male in our household.

All this your father told me, weeping and sweating scarlet droplets, barely a week before the beggars came jesting. Then he’d ordered every man in the camp to clean and sharpen their knife.

This time next year. Your wife, Sarah.

Tell me, O my son: how could I not laugh? It would have been easier for a virgin to conceive a son!

My sleep was broken by troubling dreams. I woke coughing, Hagar curled at my feet. The tent was dim with smoke. I hastened outside, my chest burning as I fought for air. A knot of herdsmen fretted by the well, their animals bawling in alarm. The beggars and their donkeys were nowhere to be seen. Abram was returning at a crotchety trot from the far edge of the settlement, the hem of his

robe singed. Behind him a massive plume of smoke fingered the sky.

“The cities are destroyed,” he shouted.

I wiped my running eyes only to see the sandals swinging from Abram’s fingers. Anger and fear tangled in my gut, rose like bile.

“He will kill *us*,” I cried.

“I fear him too, Sarah,” Abram said, reaching my side, grasping my arm as much for support as for comfort. Wheezing from effort, he swiveled to glance at the black cloud that threatened to swallow the entire sky. “Perhaps I don’t fear him enough. We must leave.”

I wrenched my arm from his touch. “How long will you remain blind? El Shaddai amuses himself with your misfortunes.”

“Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” he whispered, almost to himself. My heart hardened to stone. Just as well, for there was nothing to do but put our tents on our backs and trudge into the Negev.

The Ungraven One chased us into the past. We dragged along the same lonely road we’d traveled after our banishment from Egypt with salt on our lips, in our sandals, and in the folds of our garments. Not until we skirted Gerar could we take a full breath without swallowing the ashes of Sodom and Gomorrah. By then we’d drawn too close for its king, Abimelech, to ignore our vast herds and overflowing coffers, and Abram’s heart filled with old fears.

“They will kill me because of you,” he moaned, wringing his hands.

It had been weeks since we’d spoken. I had passed the time finding reasons to punish Hagar: she had kept me awake with her snoring, and her son had carelessly shot an arrow through a basket, spilling precious grain. As for Abram, he wandered the wilderness day and night, seeking audience with his god. Now he was worried Abimelech would kill him for a bald crone? I howled with laughter.

“You do not see yourself,” Abram said.

“You are a fool,” I said. But I obeyed him, and uncovered my eyes.

Abimelech’s court was not half as fine as Pharaoh’s. But, like Pharaoh, he lavished wealth on Abram as soon as your father said, “She is my sister!”

I crowed as the court women anointed me with oil. The concubines lowered their eyes, afraid. Ah, well—they wouldn’t fear me for long. Soon Abimelech would give me to a lesser prince, send me away, or even have me killed. I didn’t care. I would end my days knowing exactly what I was, instead of hoping I might someday become whatever El Shaddai promised I could be.

The plague first struck the women who had bathed me. They fell back on

their sumptuous couches, faces contorted in pain. Those with round bellies crouched in sudden, violent throes; they doubled over their wombs as if they were delivering suffering itself.

Two days of this, until Abimelech summoned Abram. The king of Gerar sat on the floor of his court in sackcloth, smearing ash on roughly-shaven skin.

“Why have you caused me to sin against El Shaddai?” he complained.

Abram bowed. “I did not know there was fear of him in this place.”

Abimelech gestured for a slave to deposit a sack heavy with silver at my feet. “Your sister is vindicated,” he told Abram. “Now pray to your ungraven god, that I may live.”

Royal guards carried us home in litters. That night the heavens opened and rain fell in thick ropes. I huddled, miserable, in the innermost room, my knees aching in the damp. Hagar came to comb my hair, and I was too tired to turn her away. Her fingers were so gentle that my eyes filled with tears. When she’d gone, Abram lowered me onto my bed, mouthing blessings under his breath. And there was evening and there was morning, the final day.

If you asked me, O my son, how your life began, what could I tell you?

When the blood returned, I believed I was finally releasing my spirit.

But, like a flower unfolding at dusk, my brittle flesh bloomed for one singular season. *My* flesh! O my son, what a mystery! Do you have ears to hear it?

At twilight I’d comb my gray hair until it curled dark and silken on my shoulders, and I’d call your father to me. At my touch he’d rise from the ashes of age to the fire of youth. We welcomed each starless night as children and each dawn as elders, dying by day only to resurrect at night.

How I laughed! In what world could I, who had borne only death, suddenly lie in the dark and count small, secret kicks? None of the ways in which I had marked the passing of my lonely years—the tearing down of tents, the slaughtering of lambs, the withering of oaks—could make sense of such a thing. My shriveled breasts rounded with milk. My face, crisscrossed with wrinkles, plumped soft and plush like ripe fruit. Abram cradled the globe of my belly, his lips spilling astounded praises. He plundered each flock for the choicest specimens. Altars smoked from dawn until dusk with the fragrance of your father’s constant offerings. We bore life, and in that labor, died to everything we had known before.

We named you Isaac.

Now it was my son Abram cradled to his chest, my son Abram tossed into

the air until baby giggles chased shadows out of every corner. It was my son who grew strong and limber, my son who shot arrows at the crows that gathered in the branches, my son whose evening jaunt across the field drew the admiring gaze of all.

But as you grew, so did my fear. I missed the bloom of pregnancy, your anticipated and uncomplicated existence. You'd been safe inside me. Now I fretted over you from dawn until dusk. Hagar and Ishmael looked upon you with contempt, so I banished them forever, hoping they would carry my terror into exile. Your father taught you to pile stones. I stood by, watching each spark fizzle then disappear. Even if Abram offered sacrifices without ceasing, even if I bound you—almost a man—to my breast, wouldn't El Shaddai have the last laugh? Was he not even more jealous of your father's devotion than I was? Surely he could not withstand our happiness. My dreams filled with fire, flood, and pestilence. My son, dying. My son, dead. Isaac, my only begotten.

Beyond our borders, jackals howled to a fat yellow moon. Abram woke me, his sandals in his hand.

"I am taking the boy to the mountain," he said.

"And how many lambs?" I laughed.

I saw now that his face looked cut from stone. Panic lifted me from the soft embrace of my bed. I clawed at his cold, gray skin. "What has El Shaddai asked of you this time?"

He shook his head. "Come and kiss your son," he said. "We leave at first light."

When he turned away, some dormant beast, old as the earth, uncoiled inside me.

I said, "Abram."

Still he would not look into my eyes. I bellowed and threw myself on his back, beating his shoulders with my fists. Though he faltered, falling twice to his knees under my weight, he did not stop in his course, and we emerged from our dwelling one writhing flesh, my fingernails tearing at his hair, and beard, and skin, my voice an inhuman wail. The servants lashing kindling to three donkeys stared at us, mouths agape. You stood by them, your sleep-crusted eyes slowly widening in horror.

"Mother!" you exclaimed.

Sobbing, I leapt off your father's back and pressed my face into your hair, the warm crease of your neck. You kissed me, concerned, while Abram first tried

to peel my arms from around your waist, then called for help. Two men grabbed my shoulders and yanked. I did not have much strength left; still I thrashed and screamed. Your father's blood was under my fingernails. My cries had drawn the entire household from sleep. Yet at a single nod from your father you climbed onto your donkey's back.

Your love had never—would never—age into questions.

The men held me until I could no longer distinguish your figures in the distance. When they let go of my arms, I tore my garments and crumpled to the ground, howling into the wordless void.

“God, oh God of Abraham, when will you remember me?”

Daylight broke, but I remained under the shadow of death. A slave bore me on his back to a place I did not wish to go—laid to rest in the stifling darkness of the innermost room. It seemed my sight tore in two. One eye watched you and your father ascend the mountain. I heard you gasp with effort, as you had once gasped into life against my breast, only now it wheezed like a death-rattle. My other eye saw women anoint my body with spices, lift a cup of sour wine to my lips. Their faces melted with tears like rain, but it was to the cloud I turned, the cloud which hid the Almighty. His steps were like thunder across the expanse, his voice a searing flame, his face a blot of light brighter than the sun. It lit the path to life, out of the trance of despair to the sighs of the women's tent. How they laughed in joy at my return! And how I wept, O my son, when I grasped my shroud rather than the trailing fringe of the Almighty's garment!

By then you'd sent word ahead—El Shaddai had given birth to you against the edge of a blade. You returned with your father days later and have since spoken of nothing else. You have told the story over and over, at turns trembling violently, at turns laughing. A ram caught in a thicket answered your riddle, but mine remains. Will you ever belong to me as much as to this One who promised you, who is already jealous for you? Who has the eyes to see him or the ears to hear his voice?

May the Ungraven One give us more years to ravel out his ways, O my son—yes, even to share in his jests. For who could blame me for laughing? The Almighty does as he wills, and I believe it pleases him, though I have never seen his form.

ALYSSA STADTLANDER

Loss, Accumulating

She's always had the softest skin, you've told me this every time I mentioned the way I loved her swinging fat, the fleshy parts of her upper arms. It's gone now,

withered up, and the first thing I notice is the cavern between her shoulder and collarbone where you say the water gathers when you bathe her—tranquil little pools accumulating

where the skin sags.
You grasp her paper-thin hands, the way you did every time you sat beside her in that cold church when you were afraid and she was not; you held her

arms, and she gave away pieces of herself with her silent prayers, sacrificial seeds which she planted on her own, which sprouted like berries, which she fed to you

and later, to me, too; which she now recites like a balm over her own body's fragile, yellowing skin, the last of her sweet holy juice poured out in a generous anointing.

TROY PANCAKE

Fractures

I fractured my hand on a Friday, in between attempts to install an after-market stereo in my Dodge Grand Caravan, although that was not the cause of the break. Twin messengers of intense pain and a slight bump near the base of my fifth metacarpal heralded the news of the fracture. The bump looked like a tiny anthill against the veiny landscape. Imagine the microscopic ants milling around inside, using their great strength to reset the bone for me. My opponent—a black wooden headboard—had not bucked, budged, or backed down, and he stood there still in the center of the garage, leaning against bikes and chairs and other various garbage that I had not yet dealt with, gloating. I went back inside and used my shoulder to nudge open the door to my bedroom, where my wife and son were continuing the conversation I had abandoned in anger. “I think I broke my hand,” I said, hedging.

When I was my son’s age, my mom made me write over and over a verse from the Bible until I had it memorized. “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

I drove myself with one hand to the emergency room across the street. A square pit in the dashboard, where the stereo had once lived, mocked me. Two wires hung loose, spilling out into the cabin. The hole would remain agape for my entire recovery, after which I simply put back in the original stereo because I couldn’t get the wiring right. I walked into the lobby of the emergency room, left hand cradling my right wrist, and said, for the second time, “I think I broke my hand.”

At ten years old, I shattered the shaft of a Cobra 9-wood over the back of my golf bag, alone near dusk at Baltimore Country Club. That was the first golf club I broke in anger. Another time, my little sister came out of her room for the *n*th time, long past her bedtime, crying inexplicably until I yelled back, “Just go to sleep!” and drove my fist into the drywall, unintentionally avoiding the stud. At various moments, I screamed at my mother in the passenger seat, the foyer, the computer room. The most painful story to admit is when I told my brother to go to hell, for insignificant reasons I can no longer remember.

Neither can I now remember what I was talking to my son about that day that I punched a headboard in my garage. It is always difficult to recall the

reasons for anger once the buzz subsides, when time and consequence teleport you back to earth and that red-faced, huffing, glowering hulk seems alien. The rationale evaporates because the stated *why* isn't really why at all. The *whys* are often objectively silly—suggestions about shirt sizes, slushy refusals, humming a repetitive tune. They point somewhere else, like the referred pain of a toothache or heart attack.

Every nurse who came through my partition asked what happened. I tried to take refuge in generalities, but was not given the mercy of this privacy. They pressed, and I expanded, slowly, curtly. “I hit something. I punched something. I punched a headboard. I punched a headboard because I was mad.” Finally, they nodded and smirked and freed me to sit in solitude.

It pained me to tell a new anger story in the present tense. I thought I had left rage in the past, like a slippery memory. I thought that Scripture had reformed my brain and my body for long-suffering. On Sunday, when I arrived with a temporary splint at the new church where I had recently taken a staff position, I was forced to tell this new anger story to my pastor and congregation, for church members are nearly as nosy as nurses.

The emergency room doctor showed me the x-ray to confirm my assessment—it was broken—and told me that this particular break is called a boxing fracture. She explained the irony that boxers never actually sustain this injury since they learn how to punch correctly, putting the force behind their first two knuckles. The subtle insult did not go unnoticed. They wrapped me up in a temporary splint and sent me home with a referral to a specialist.

I used to say that God healed me from anger, a belief I've now been forced to revise. The revision was necessitated by parenting. I wonder about that. What are my precious children doing to elicit such monstrous responses? Precious. That's the word banging around in my head, the word gifted to me by Dr. Karyn Purvis, the word that I have squandered, squished in my back pocket like a forgotten receipt. I am angry at my precious son because he will not talk to me; he will not talk to me because I am angry at him. He winces at the question *can I talk to you for a second?* They all do. Parenting means being out of control, being metaphorically and sometimes literally not in the driver's seat. I can see the future, all the potential red lights, drifts, bumps and accidents, but I'm stuck directing, pointing and shouting, “Stop! Stop! Look out!” But I cannot touch the pedals. I cannot turn the wheel. I mistakenly believe that I must save them from themselves, and that sternness communicates truth like a battering ram, blowing through thick walls erected by trauma and hurt and, naturally, puberty.

On the contrary, like a callus, this friction only hardens their defenses. My wife worries about my relationship with my son, that I am breaking it with my untamed tongue, and there are no splints for souls.

The specialist was a plastic surgeon, so there were sample breast implants on the countertop beside me as he looked at the x-ray that had been sent from the ER. "This is called a boxing fracture," he explained. "But boxers rarely get it because they are trained to punch with the power in their first two fingers." He mimed a punch, emphasizing the leading knuckles. I nodded, feigning ignorance. He carefully unwrapped the splint and examined the protruding bone, pressing it into the correct position and releasing it. As it turned out, the specialist had recently begun attending the church I had just left. I said a silent prayer of thanks for HIPAA. He explained the necessary surgery based on the location of the fracture, how pins that would hold my bone in place for the following six weeks. He explained the cleaning process: rubbing alcohol and cotton balls every day to prevent infection. No water. No slipping in the shower. No punching, obviously.

As he left, he stopped and ribbed me the words of Jesus: "Be angry and do not sin."

My daughter's counselor tells her about a feeling she calls sad-mad, because mad always brings a buddy, and I understand that this is a word for me. Some nights, I lie in bed, arms folded on my chest, stiff like a corpse, while my sad-mad roils beneath my sternum and inside my skull. I acknowledge there is a hint of melodrama in this activity, particularly since I am supposed to be the adult here. I engage in deep breathing with religious fervor and, sometimes, religious prayer.

My recovery stretched to seven weeks, and I spent those seven weeks making advances in the use of my left hand. Each day, I delicately removed the brace in the bathtub, trying and failing to avoid the pins like Operation. It hurt when the hardened mold tugged at them as it came off. I twisted the yellow knobs protruding from my skin and cleaned around the pin. I tried to remember what it was like to be a kid, to be exasperated by your parents. I was exasperated often as a teenager, although hindsight and a fully developed frontal cortex have triggered some re-evaluation of the true villain in many of my adolescent conflicts. In those years, I must admit that it never occurred to me that I might not be a Great Dad. It is not arrogance of the youth that causes this delusion, but ignorance. When you are maturing, you assume that one day you will be mature. You will reach the end, the goal, the fullness of potentiality; you

will be the assembled machine. At some point we must reckon with the truth that we are not who we had hoped to be.

Two small purple dots mark where the pins used to be, one directly on the knuckle at the base of my pinky, the other along the underside of the hand. These spots remind me that our sins are never really vanquished; they simply need some time to regroup, as we all do now and again.

It is now, and I am angry at one of my children. I am in the garage again and I am punching again. This time, I fling my fist—with proper boxing form—into the heavy bag we purchased as a gift from Santa for the kids. (But I use it more than anyone else.) The bag swings like a pendulum, metal chain squeaking on the hinge I bolted into the ceiling at 1 a.m. Christmas Day, as I wait for my breathing to level so I can go back inside to make it right.

ALFONSO SASIETA

Saints & Strings

The salt in God's sweat
is a foretaste
of the feast
to come, the friction
& heat, a cocktail
lounge full of language
a gringo perceives
as *too fast*

& I am almost fluent
in a few dialects
of the body—
the jargon of gyrating hips,
the hand's idiom,
as it wraps a torso
& fingers the blade
of a shoulder & even
the strings
of the violin
know the doublespeak
in our street music.

Am I alone in my revelry,
or dost Thou glory
in the handful of conga
skillfully romping
leather & skin?

The violin, drum & trumpet
are all here to make love
in one *conjunto*
& I will tell you what Ignatius told Hopkins.

We are made to praise
& I remember my grandpa
listening to Bach
at the Sem,
how he rose at the end
& proclaimed
exquisite!

& I too will trumpet
my truth & all the flute's
questions. Is God a luthier
or a *trigueña*? A refiner's fire
or all-consuming?

Even the tilde above the *ñ*
is covered in flame.
So tell Francis
that I have found
Brother Fire.
Tell him to flee
Assisi, to look for
the flame
among those who sing
with San Martín de Porres
in their hands.

JANA-LEE GERMAINE

Pentecost at the Holy Ghost Revival Outreach Center

The Sunday that Reverend Sister Maya
knocked me to the floor,
I was covered with a scarlet cloth.
Three matrons singing *Jesus, Jesus*,
laid me on the grey nap
of rug and sand.
They halleluiahed as I cried
tears of joy, or maybe tears
because I wasn't feeling joy.
Reverend Sister Maya held her hands
above my head, fingers long and thin
and splayed like lightning rods.
She said my face
shone with the glory of God,
said *The Father is lovin' on you*,
while the congregation stamped,
and in the back my son asked,
Why is Mommy on the floor?
Sister Maya's face glowed with sweat
and strength. I wanted to laugh,
lying on my back, bedazzled
by the lights, but I didn't know
what I felt, or how to answer,
and all the while I was slain in the Spirit
while Sister Maya's fingers hummed with God,
who was lovin' on me,
lovin' on me.

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MARK D. BENNION's poems have appeared in *Iodine Poetry Journal*, *The Lyric*, *RHINO*, *Sijo*, *Spiritus*, and other journals. His most recent collection, *Beneath the Falls: Poems* (2021), was published by Resource Publications. Since 2000, he's taught writing and literature courses at BYU-Idaho. He and his family reside in the Upper Snake River Valley.

LISA BROGNANO is the author of the novels *In the Interest of Faye* (Golden Antelope, 2017) and *A Man for Prue* (Resplendence, 2017). Her full-length poetry books include *The Willow Howl* (Nixes Mate, 2017), *The Copper Weathervane* (Luchador, 2020), and *Royal Blue Shutters* (Fernwood Press, 2021). Her poems and short fiction have appeared in national and international literary journals. Brognano holds a master's degree in English and another in Fine Art. She lives in New York with her husband.

EUGENIA SHERMAN BROWN first encountered mosaics while teaching history to college and seminary students. In 2004, she took up a "hobby" of making mosaics, which became her second career. She grew up in Asheville, North Carolina, and received higher education in Waco, Texas, and Madison, Wisconsin. She studied art and mosaic at the Chicago Mosaic School and in the University of Wisconsin Art Department. She is drawn to the spiritual metaphor lodged in the mosaic process: in brokenness...beauty.

CASIE DODD lives in Arkansas with her husband and two children. Her writing has appeared in *Fare Forward*, *Ekstasis*, *Front Porch Republic*, and other journals. She is the Founder and Editor of Belle Point Press, a new small press celebrating the literary culture of the American Mid-South.

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The Windhover

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