The Restored Gospel and Applied Christianity

Student Essays in Honor of President David O. McKay

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Faith and Imagination Institute

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THE RESTORED GOSPEL AND APPLIED CHRISTIANITY:
STUDENT ESSAYS IN HONOR OF PRESIDENT DAVID O. MCKAY

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Cover image of David O. McKay as a young man

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Acknowledgments

When a lawyer asks Jesus to state the greatest commandment, Christ answers, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matt. 22.37). American theologian Cornelius Plantinga writes of Christ's response, "In other words, you shall love God with everything you have and everything you are. Everything. Every longing, every endowment, each of your intellectual gifts, any athletic talent or computer skill, capacity for delight, every good thing that has your fingerprints on it—take all this, says Jesus, and refer it to God" (11).

Plantinga also points out a crucial difference between Christ's command recorded in Matthew and the parallel Mosaic version in Deuteronomy, which requires we love God with of our *heart, soul*, and *might* (see Deut. 6.5). Christ's addition to the command, specifically that we should also love God with all of our *mind*, is noteworthy.

The authors in this volume all write about coming to love and know God—of seeking to learn about His nature and love Him with our *hearts, souls*, and our *minds*. In this volume we can read about loving God and several components of how to accomplish that process: the complex relationship between love and suffering, that we need to be willing to seek God's love even when it seems difficult to access, understanding that God loves us enough to refine us in ways that are painful, and the power of yielding our heart, soul, and mind to God's perfect and unfathomable love.

Several authors in this volume illuminate the paradoxical relationship between love and suffering, especially in our relationship with God. Alanna Hess, the author of "Charity Suffereth Long," describes the idea that suffering might be an eternal principle. "My suffering brought us together. It makes me wonder if suffering and spirituality are intrinsically linked" (3). She continues to consider that link between joy and pain, love and suffering on a divine scale, and considers what the implications of this might be. "How, then, do I accept that God Omnipotent can weep, vulnerable to the sufferings of His children? How do I accept the joy of a life like His?" (7).

Nicholas Rex in "Little Bird" also describes the complexity of love and suffering as he grapples with serving his disabled brother. He imagines a version of his life where love overwhelms suffering, but recognizes that on some level, love and suffering will always coexist. "And instead of knowing the world we will know each other. And when we both lie down to die, our life will have been our choice, and I will say, I loved my little brother, and I refused to accept his destiny, because sometimes destiny must be raged against and sometimes love must be unreasonable" (18).

There is an echo of the idea of the "unreasonable" nature of love in Ariana Feichko's "Death of Spring." Feichko writes of the many miscarriages her mother suffered, and wonders, "Why did death have to hurt so much, even when I had never met my brothers and sisters? How could I believe in a God who uses death as a shaping tool?" (32). But even in that suffering, she writes that love can be found: "The result of that suffering and death, however, is priceless. Nothing could compare to the joy I felt on that cold day in February, which seemed to sparkle and shine brighter than any April morning. In that moment, nothing mattered save for those big, dark eyes staring deep into my own. And for the first time in years, I felt the true power of the Savior's love for me—something I have tried to hold onto ever since" (33).

In addition to the wrestle between love and suffering, authors in this volume express a willingness to turn towards God's love even when that love seems difficult to access. Two authors use mission experiences to express how we can sometimes feel isolated from God's love, and that we must decide to hold on and reach toward it. Samuel Charles writes in "Forks That Bend" about his experience of serving much of his mission during COVID and in strict quarantine. He claims that, like a useful fork, we must attain a certain spiritual pliability in order to be successful servants of God: "It might be a little harder to stab the spine of a lettuce leaf without that faux-metal stiffness, but you can always try again, every time, because for these forks, there is no snapping under pressure. There is only a durable, malleable, optimal *flex*" (35). Somewhat similarly, in her essay "Translating Russia," Mauri Pollard Johnson aims to tighten the gap between reality and our limited Western understanding of the Russian people she served. We can apply this same principle of seeking God's love in our own lives, "So maybe this is how it works: we write, we read, we try. We use translation as we attempt to make the unbridgeable gap so small we can hardly see it. And then we carry over as much as we can" (58).

One author reports finding evidence of God's love in a unique family configuration, even when others do not see it there. In her essay "Little Women," Eden Williams records her experience of growing up in a family of six sisters, "All my biology classes taught me that what determined gender was always a fifty-fifty chance and that my family was no exception. That is what I put on my tests, that is how I explained it to others, and that is what I told myself that Christmas morning. And yet I never quite believed it. It affected my life far too much for it to be a product of mere coincidence" (64). These authors continue to seek and search for God's love, even in unlikely places and when it seems difficult to access.

The authors in this volume acknowledge that God's love is perfect and refining, and that refinement can hurt. Fleur Van Woerkom, in "This Water God Directs," speaks of God's refining power by contemplating the way He directs the power of water. "Jesus, our perfect Savior, walked calmly on water in the midst of

a storm and turned water into wine. Prophets called upon God for water in deathly deserts, and water was provided according to faith to disprove disbelief" (73). Relatedly, Megan McOmber Wight writes about God's refining power in her own life in her essay, "Breath, Babies, and the Immortal Jellyfish," which deals with her postpartum experience. "I do not understand a God who lets a daughter suffer so much after bearing a child. I do not understand why He answers some prayers so quickly and why He lets us sit in the wilderness, bleed in our own Gethsemanes, or burn in the fire for so long. But what I have come to understand is there is an unexpected reverence that comes as a result of pain" (84).

Isaac James Richards in "The Vehicle of the Metaphor" addresses eternal principles through the metaphor of vehicles, recognizing that our refinement and mortal experience will someday be seen from a time-shattering perspective. "I only remember opening my eyes to the sudden realization that I was hundreds of yards down the road from where I was before. The landscape had skipped a beat. The road was empty. The car had stayed its course, even with the wheel in my limp, unconscious hands. It was as though I had jumped forward in time—an eternal blip" (100). Although refinement can be painful, these authors demonstrate that we can find God's love in it.

We also learn lessons in this volume about both the challenge and the impact of yielding our minds to God's perfect and unfathomable love. Sarah Safsten writes in "On Feet Keeping" about the natural hesitancy we might feel in yielding to God's will, and in her case, to her leading dance partner, "I often feel that I can lead myself better than the leader can. As a follower of God, my resistance is sometimes due to pride. But I also think I'm resistant because of doubt or fear. In other words, I don't know what I'm being led to do, and I'm afraid of stepping in the wrong direction" (110). Similarly, Samantha Smith in "Delaware and Pink Crayons" maintains that yielding to God's will can help us reach beyond our own limiting notions. "And though my relationship with God is complex at times, I know that I do not want to tell Him that what I did with my arms and legs and lungs full of air was memorize the nutrient make-up of a Cliff bar" (121).

Ultimately, we know that yielding to God's love can perfect and heal us. Kayla Williams in "Sea Glass" writes about grief and depression. "I felt the weight of my grief from my toes to my hair follicles, in my stomach, and in my arteries. It was a sorrow so deep, so aching, that all I wanted to do was force it into the ground, into the air, into the cushions of my couch—anywhere but inside of my body, where I swore it would tear me apart. I couldn't hold it all by myself anymore" (125). As Williams turns to the refining love offered through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, she recognizes that through it we can find healing. "Right now, I may be a shard from a broken bottle, but through Christ, the Living Water, I can be smooth and whole and beautiful."

We are grateful to these authors who make clear in beautiful and powerful ways that to love God perfectly, we must choose to apply not only our hearts and souls but also our minds to that sacred relationship. Plantinga writes about what is means to love God with our minds: "To hear in the world both the song of God and the groaning of all creating, to prize what is lovely and to suffer over what is corrupt, to ponder these things and to struggle to understand them and God's redeeming ways with them—these are ways of loving God with all our minds" (12). We hope you enjoy the essays in this volume by authors who add their testimonies to the expansive power of keeping commandment to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds.

Works Cited

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–Jane Della Brady and Rebecca Walker Clarke

ALANNA HESS

Charity Suffereth Long

I sat in an empty Relief Society room with another sister, the lights flickering above us, the almost imperceptible buzzing of the heater filling the gaps in conversation. Church had ended fifteen minutes ago, and the rest of our YSA ward was enjoying a Linger Longer dinner. We sat alone.

"I'm just so tired," she said, closing her eyes. "I don't know. I don't know why God would send us here to suffer."

I nodded.

She held up the hat she'd been knitting during the lesson. The stitches spiraled in an endless circle while the rest of the yarn spooled in her lap. Circles, cycles—eternity in those stitches. "I try to keep my fingers busy, making hats," she said, "but sometimes I look down and I've just . . . dug my nails into my arm. Or I use this needle." She pushed up her sleeves to show me the scabs lacing her skin, red and crackling. One of them dripped blood in a slow ooze, like sap.

I murmured something about how painful that looked, how I was sorry, knowing that the words were meaningless, that none of the words could express the tight ball of emotion in my chest: pity and love and compassion and pain and fear.

She revolved the knitting needle in her hands and pressed its tip against one of the scabs. "I'm not going to hurt myself more," she said, even as her fingers whitened around the needle, pushing it down harder, her skin buckling. "I'm not. I've hurt myself enough, but . . . sometimes I just want it all to end. You know?"

I didn't know. I didn't know what it felt like to experience depression. I didn't know what it was like to long for death. I didn't have those experiences. I didn't know what to say. All I knew was that I wanted her suffering to end.

• • •

"Seventy percent of Hindus live in very poor communities," said my World Religions professor, pacing the front of the room, "in a state of suffering. That's part of why their concept of heaven looks so different from the Western, Christian construct. For them, heaven is the lack of suffering. They don't gain mansions or streets paved with gold. It's a release; they lose their pain as they become one with Brahman."

Suffering again. It seemed that every religion we learned about had to give an explanation for the pervasiveness of suffering. We all suffer. We enter the world screaming, and (if we're lucky to live that long) we leave it aching from the diseases and decay of old age.

"According to Hinduism, we are each a water droplet in the ocean that is Brahman, the Ultimate, the substance of the universe. You can't go back and capture that individual drop after it goes back in." He pointed at the class—at me. "You, the individual—though you were only an illusion to begin with—will cease to exist when you reach nirvana, unity with Brahman."

I typed this in my notes and leaned back in my chair, glad that we had a better understanding of the afterlife. Glad we didn't have a heaven where we had to sacrifice individuality for peace. Glad we could keep our souls even while shedding the suffering of this life.

I didn't think about how our theology pivots on the central, integral suffering of Jesus Christ. I didn't think about relationships that continue beyond the grave, an infinite Atonement, a need for opposition, or a God who cannot help but weep for His creations. I didn't think that these doctrines would one day require me to grapple with the question, *Is suffering eternal?*

• • •

When I returned home from my mission, my stake president asked me to share the most spiritual experience from my mission with my family. I closed my eyes and pondered for a moment. I didn't remember a baptism, a lesson, or a zone conference. I remembered the hardest transfer of my mission, when every word I said seemed misinterpreted, when I couldn't trust my own emotions, when I didn't feel like myself in my own skin.

I knelt in my closet one night, just as it says in the scriptures, and poured out my brokenness, my suffering, to my Father. I felt His presence, His love, a warmth cradling my heart. He comforted me and bound me up. I felt more connected to Him in that moment than I did at any other time on my mission.

My suffering brought us together. It makes me wonder if suffering and spirituality are intrinsically linked. "It must needs be," Lehi told his children, "that there is an opposition in all things." Without that, men cannot have joy. "Wherefore, all things must be a compound in one; wherefore if it should be one body [without the depth of opposition] it must needs remain as dead" (2 Ne. 2.11).

There are many opposites—happiness and pain, rest and suffering, joy and sorrow. If life requires opposites, I wonder if resurrection, the conquering of death, means that we continue to experience these opposites after this life.

To paraphrase Lehi, if heaven was made up only of happiness, it would be as if we were still dead.

What does it really mean to be dead, though?

Despite the deaths I've faced so far, I don't feel any closer to answering this question. The obscurity of the afterlife haunts me as each death passes: my grandma (stroke), my friend's dad (health complications), a schoolmate (car crash), an old friend (car crash), my roommate's brother (I never learned how he died; I only knew, vaguely, my roommate's pain), unknown kids (a shooting), a distant cousin (murder), an unknown peer (suicide), a man I taught on my mission (COVID– 19), my great-aunt (health complications), my great-uncle (health complications), and a girl in my YSA ward (sudden health complications).

I know the doctrines—spirit world, spirit prison—but I don't know what they mean. With each person who exits this life, I'm left with unanswered questions. Where are they? They are near—but where? They love us—but how? I don't know what they feel, what they do, if they experience peace or pain, love or loneliness. They are only shadows now, through the veil. They are an ache in my chest tugging on my heart, a continued pall growing in my soul's crevices, a silent question that has no answer.

• • •

I sat in the temple, waiting to feel something. The overwhelming peace that everyone talks about experiencing in the temple, that peace that shuts out the cares of the world. Or, I thought, even just a flicker of warmth. Something to tell me that I was still connected to heaven, the way I had been in that closet, on my mission. But I felt nothing. I was doing all the right things: I prayed morning and night, read my scriptures daily, attended the temple every week, but it felt more and more like I was living out of habit, with only the vague echoes of spiritual experiences to haunt me. For almost half a year, the disconnect between me and God had crescendoed.

Even in the temple, in God's house, where I knew I was doing something right and good, I didn't *feel* anything. The

emptiness led to confusion, and then frustration, and then guilt. Didn't serving God out of love mean not expecting anything in return? I gripped my hands together in requisite, futile prayer. I didn't close my eyes, just looked down at the buttoned cuffs of my white dress, trying to understand. I couldn't figure out if this distance from God was my fault or His. Was He testing my patience by stepping away? Or was it my choice to come to Him, but I just couldn't figure out how?

I spread the funeral program neatly on my lap, the photo of a dead girl staring up at me. Her casket gleamed, dominating the space in front of the pulpit. Flowers bloomed over the walls of the rostrum, gathered in large bouquets to commemorate the young woman. She'd been in my YSA ward. I'd texted her just two weeks ago, wishing her a happy Thanksgiving. Now she was dead.

As I listened to the speakers, I knew they meant well when they said the usual platitudes. They were trying to comfort. But as I listened, I concluded that there were three things I never wanted anyone to say at my funeral: "She would want you to be happy," "She's in a better place," and, "She's at peace now."

No. I would want my family and friends to feel sad if they need to feel sad, because they love me. I would want to tell them that even if heaven is "better," I would regret leaving those I loved. And I certainly wouldn't want to be in a state of perfect peace. Surely, if life continues after death, if I retain my same nature as a spirit, then I will be sad when I die—sad because of our separation, sad for the suffering my loved ones feel.

If life continues after death, I do not want to be reduced to just a fraction of life.

In the week following that funeral, I wrote a poem from the perspective of a soul who has just passed away, addressing her loved ones. One stanza reads:

> You tell yourself I'm free from care.
> Do you think that's what my soul would want?

No loving or missing or aching or hurting or
wanting or wishing?
No emotions to pierce me, wound me, crush
my heart in brilliance
when I think of you
alone?

I think sometimes about the clarity that death brings to life—the sharpness, almost painfulness of a beautiful moment, knowing that it will end. I think of how *exquisite* life is, in the way that Alma uses the word. "There could be nothing so exquisite and so bitter as were my pains. . . . on the other hand, there can be nothing so exquisite and sweet as was my joy" (Alma 36.21). Alma uses "exquisite" to describe both pain and joy. To me, something *exquisite* is something so wonderful, so vivid, so strange that it can only be comprehended through experience. It is a fusion, a synthesis, a compound. Joy and pain. Light and dark.

In that moment, in the shadow of the death of a girl like myself, I felt that life could not be life without pain. Life after death could not be pain-free. I didn't want it to be. I didn't want to live without pain. But how can I ever convince myself that I want to live *with* it?

• • •

I still remember the feeling as a young girl on a Sunday evening when I first learned the doctrine of divine progression. I realized that if I was faithful, I could have all the power and glory and goodness and joy of deity. Sitting in my living room, I thought in wonder, *I can become a God.*

This is one of the most beautiful doctrines of our Church. But it's one of the most *exquisite* doctrines as well—comprised of both light and dark tones, both joy and suffering. We're told that eternal life is "the greatest of all the gifts of God" (D&C 14.7). Nephi wrote that in the kingdom of God, our "joy shall

be full forever" (2 Ne. 9.18). I've always thought God's life would be the most blissful, the most radiant, the most glorious life imaginable.

But Enoch saw God weeping.

Enoch saw in vision the greatest being in our universe, and He was weeping.

Recognizing Enoch's confusion, our Father explained, "should not the heavens weep, seeing these [my children] shall suffer?" (Moses 7.37). And hearing this, Enoch's "heart swelled wide as eternity," and "all eternity shook" (Moses 7.41). Enoch ached seeing His Father suffering, and so do I.

I've seen my earthly father cry a few times, in anguish, in pain, in anxiety—sobbing, hunched on the cold tile floor, shoulders shaking. It's frightening, seeing the weakness of someone I've always perceived as so strong. How, then, do I accept that God Omnipotent can weep, vulnerable to the sufferings of His children? How do I accept the joy of a life like His?

Jesus wept, too, with Martha and Mary, even knowing that Lazarus would rise again. He wept for the little ones in ancient America. I think He might have wept with me in that closet. I don't want to believe my Brother is always in pain, but how can it be otherwise? His brutal payment for our sins, at least, seems confined to those few terrible hours in Gethsemane and Calvary. But He also suffered for every sorrow and every pain this world can inflict, as Alma taught (see Alma 7.11), and divine empathy cannot be limited to a garden and a cross in the year 33 AD. If Jesus knows my pain when I'm praying in a closet, pouring out my heart, then He must be in pain at that moment too. If He knows the pain and the sorrow of everyone in the world, He must always, always be in pain.

It adds a sharp layer of meaning to the Christlike attribute of longsuffering.

With this weighing on my mind, everything seems laced with pain. Even while reading the Book of Mormon, I wonder.

When Mormon taught that charity, the pure love of Christ, "endureth forever," did he fully grasp the implications? Charity, he taught, "suffereth long, . . . beareth all things, . . . endureth all things" (Moro. 7.45). Charity is suffering. Christ's love is a suffering love. And, supposedly, it is a gift, a gift we should seek "with all the energy of heart" so that we can become like Jesus Christ (Moro. 7.48).

Does that mean that we, along with Jesus and Heavenly Father, will be bearing, enduring, and suffering pain throughout all of eternity, because "charity never faileth" (Moro. 7.46)? Will we weep forever? If I let myself think about this concept too much, then our life here, the plan of happiness, and our eternal salvation seems impossibly bleak.

• • •

The silence of the Spirit became deafening one Sunday. I read the conference talk by Elder Kevin W. Pearson, "Are You Still Willing?" and felt frustration and anger and shame wash over me. I wanted to be willing so that I could keep my promises to God, so that I could do what I knew was right. But I wasn't willing. I was tired of doing the same things over and over without getting anything out of it.

I sorted through my tangled emotions and feelings with a friend on the phone. A painful impression wriggled into my mind—*Heavenly Father can't be just and loving if I can't feel His influence*—but I pushed away the heresy. I closed my mouth and didn't let the words escape. Surely, a righteous Latter-day Saint would never doubt God's purposes or feel ungrateful. He had given me everything—my life, my family, this world—and I wanted to say He was wrong for keeping me from feeling the Spirit for a few months?

I didn't say any of this out loud. I couldn't admit to feeling hurt by God. All I said was, "I just have a hard time feeling God's love right now."

• • •

On a fast Sunday, I sat next to my friend from Relief Society as we listened to the testimonies. She was knitting a new hat. She had mentioned to me before the meeting began that she was particularly struggling with her depression and suicidal ideation today.

The meeting unfolded as testimony meetings sometimes do, with an early speaker sharing an experience that sparks a dozen other testimonies on the same topic. The topic that day? Finding joy and happiness in Christ. Encouragements to smile more. Experiences of acting in faith and becoming happier. Promises that if you turn to Christ, you will always find comfort and peace. It all wove into a solid equation: *if you love God, you will be happy, and your suffering will ease*.

I struggled to reconcile my testimony of the joy found in Christ while my friend sat next to me, struggling with chemical imbalances that made it almost impossible for her to feel happiness. As I pondered, I came to a realization, one that I've had to accept over and over again in my life: *Joy is not the absence of pain*. Then a new realization struck, one I hadn't ever truly considered. *Joy is not the absence of pain. It's going through pain* with *and* because *of love*.

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When I told my friend on the phone that I had a hard time feeling God's love, she was the one who opened the door for that love to reach me. It was her friendship that broke through my spiritual barriers, and it was her love that softened the pain. Her response probably felt normal to her. Maybe she even thought it was insufficient, overly trite or simple. But it was exactly what I needed to hear.

"I hope you can feel His love more," she said, "because you are so good, and you are so loved."

Warmth flooded me, infused my heart and lungs and skin and soul. *The Spirit*. It had been so long. But I felt it, and it felt like a message directly from my Father.

You are so good. If she saw me as good, and if my Father saw me as good, even with my doubts, then I felt that I *could* be good. I could be strong enough, if they had faith in me.

You are so loved. I felt His love, and that made all the pain and confusion ease.

After thanking my friend, I knelt by my bed and spoke to my Father. I promised to renew my covenants. I thanked Him for His faith in me, for not giving up. I thanked Him that I was able to continue for so long while going through my mists of darkness. I thanked Him for a friend who cared about me enough to be with me in my pain. He'd spoken to me through her.

• • •

Sometimes when I think of heaven, I'm scared. What if it's painful, every day, for eternity, so that we can grow? I worry that it's something like serving a mission, with your highest highs interspersed with your lowest lows. I'm grateful for my mission, and I love what I learned there, but I'm not sure I have the courage to go back to a world like that, so filled with challenges and struggles and disappointment, with sorrow and loneliness and weariness and feeling forsaken, whether or not I really am.

But as I sat in that testimony meeting with a wonderful, suffering girl sitting next to me, thinking that *joy is pain with love*, I felt a tentative peace about the idea. I pictured a heaven that was not necessarily filled with pain, but filled with care, in every definition of the word. A world where we would care for each other. We would care about the pain others go through. We would be careful not to hurt one another. We would have heavenly cares, concerns for each other. We would be bound by deep connections, the kind that only come through shared suffering, softened by love.

Vulnerable conversations, tender hugs, tears shed side by side—these are the exquisite experiences. These are the celestial materials. These are the pains that become cares instead, through the transformative power of love. Perhaps, I thought, God allows us to feel forsaken because it gives us an opportunity to reach out and extend love to one another. It lets us practice a heavenly community. It allows us to become more celestial.

If I imagine a world in which every pain is met by the right kind of love, support, and care from the other members of the community—and if I add to that world that we will all be healthy and whole, and death will never haunt us again—it does begin to feel like heaven.

It begins to feel like a place in which I could live forever.

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After the testimony meeting ended, I sat with my friend. I put my arm around her shoulder, asked her how she was feeling, and held her close as she cried.

I don't know everything she experiences, and I don't know all of her suffering, but I try to love and suffer with her. I listen to her, and I do what I can. I try to follow the example of my Savior, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross" (Heb. 12.2).

I don't know what that joy will look like or if suffering will continue forever. But if suffering is a part of our eternal destiny, I trust that it will be a suffering wrapped in, softened by, and treated with love. And I will seek that love "with all the energy of heart" (Moro. 7.48).

NICHOLAS REX

Little Bird

All the glory that the Lord has made
And the complications when I see His face
In the morning in the window. (Stevens)

I keep worrying about whether I'm washing parts of the car you can't reach with the hose. I stay by the front bumper and scrape off bugs from Canada and Kansas, hoping you don't notice the new crack in the windshield and ask me where I got it, because I'll have to tell you Pennsylvania, and you'll ask me about the birds out there, and what else I saw, and I'll hesitate about how much to tell you, and wonder if you'll get jealous, or depressed, and I'll want to curl beneath the car where the soap bubbles pop on the pavement and breathe in the suds until my lungs ferment and I no longer have to be your older brother.

You're slumped forward in Dad's camping chair precariously set up on the driveway, your cane under your right armpit, garden hose in hand waiting for me to give the command to spray the lather off the car. Mom and Dad are at work, I'm home on a college break taking care of you. You're twenty-one.

I have to wash the back bumper. I go around and watch you through the windows, you start to play with the hose nozzle, flipping through the different spray settings until you find a soft frizzy one you like and sprinkle the flowers on the side of the driveway. You cup a hand over your brow and study the sky for birds. A pair of eagles nest in the neighbor's old pine tree. You watch them take off at dawn and sit in the shaded branches at noon; vultures sweep the sky every now and then, circling for some unfortunate carcass. Your eyes come down again, and you're stuck looking into your knees, the hair that runs along your forearms, the cat-smudges on your eyeglasses.

The seizures haven't been as bad lately. The doctors never knew what to call it—we think it's spasticity, a rare symptom on the autism spectrum. But there is no way to tell for sure. And even if there is, there is no cure, just a destiny. And you're already sitting in it.

When I come around the front of the car I say, *dude, can you spray some more*, and, *hey, you missed a spot*, and I can't even look at you while I wash the wheels because if I see you in the camping chair I'll hunch over and cover my face with the drying towel to conceal the tears and the trembling that start to erupt in me, too.

• • •

The first time it happened I was laughing. We'd hiked hard down a canyon wall and up the other side, after twelve miles with forty-pound packs in the desert. You said you needed to rest, so we sat down, and your legs started to shake, and I said, what're you doing, the Irish Jig? and I watched through my video camera, where I can still hear myself snickering in the shaky video. Your legs are moving but you are not moving them on purpose, they are snapping like rubber bands, and the face you are making is not for fun, it is a look of pain and terror—

because you knew and our brother knew that something had just been unleashed, and that everything was going to change.

We set up a tent and laid you inside while our brother and I stood outside and talked about what to do. But we started to hear a crinkle in the tarp and a very scared fourteen-year-old little brother start calling for his older brothers and so we came, and we ripped open the tent, and you were lying there in between tangled sleeping bags and open bags of trail mix and you were whacking the floor with your elbows and slamming the ground with your knees and crying out for us to help you and we each grabbed a side of your body and held you down but your neck started to pound the back of your skull into the dirt so I grabbed a coat and put it under your head and you couldn't even make a sound as you started to cry, little tears forced themselves out of your caruncles and I thought how precious, like tears shed in the Sahara Desert, or Antarctica, and you opened your mouth and tried to say words, *water, leg, stretch, left, hold me*, and you puckered your lips and you inhaled sharply and grunted while your chest heaved compulsive motions downward, and eventually you asked us to ask God to bless you, and I closed my eyes and I held your body and I huddled over you like Mary might have done over the dead man she loved, and I wept bitterly that my tears mixed with your sweat and I asked God to somehow heal you.

I worked at an old folk's home in high school. I served them dinner Monday to Thursday. The residents were mostly elderly widows and widowers, seventies, eighties, one lady in her nineties. It seemed like they were all waiting to die. Each lived alone in a room with yellow wallpaper. They had a calendar of monthly events that gave them something to look forward to: Bingo every Tuesday and Friday night, church service Sunday morning, field trips to the mall every other Saturday—but the thing that kept them alive was socializing at dinner.

Every night we started seating at 6:15 p.m. But some formed a quiet little line outside the door, eagerly perched on the edges of walkers or benches, at 5:30. They had nothing to do but wait. Wait until Friday night. Wait until Sunday morning. Wait until 6:15.

I'd sit down with them after their dinner plates were served. We'd talk about me mostly, which I grew tired of and felt selfish about. They had experienced a lifetime more than I had but all they wanted to talk about was how was the football team this year, and how would we cast the musical with so many young boys, and what was my plan after high school again? I told stories from the scenes of my youth because being young was the only thing they wanted to remember. I had what they wanted: mobility, a family that was present, freedom.

One day a lady who couldn't speak English asked me to deliver dinner to her door and when I arrived she motioned me inside. I entered her room and noticed the yellow wallpapered walls. Barren. On her kitchen table, next to an unsolved Rubik's Cube, was a photograph. We used Google Translate on our phones to communicate in silence. I passed her my message, *Who is he?* And she smiled and her eyes lit up and she passed me her message back. *My son. Where is he? He put me in here and went back to Mexico.* Her name was Dora, and she asked me to teach her English because she couldn't understand any of the other residents and none of them could understand her. It was rare for a resident to receive visitors of any kind—they were usually family, if they ever visited at all—but Dora had no one. Dora's probably dead now, and I don't know if she ever got to hear any of my news about the football team or young boys being cast in musicals. I don't know if her family ever came to visit her, or if she waited for every other Saturday to go to the mall, unable to tell anyone how good the Cinnabons were.

I don't know what the right thing to do is when a family begins to witness the deteriorating health of a loved one. I

don't know if hiding the daily pains of the disabled helps non-disabled people feel less guilty, or if turning from other people's pain denies the compassion that makes us more than a reptile. When a young caribou is injured and lags behind the herd, his mother will stay with him and protect him a while. But when the wolves come, she must leave him, knowing there is nothing she could do to save her child. Perhaps washing our hands of the pain we cannot fix is the only way to move forward—but letting go of the people we can't protect is no easier to live with than putting our heart into a tourniquet and expecting to run a marathon.

I don't know how many elderlies volunteered to live alone for the end of their life. Every night at dinner I saw them—other people's family members—all yearning for connection. We talked about the casual privileges of youth and I put on a fake smile and hid my weeping for their loneliness. After a lifetime of connecting with others, now what they hoped for was the dinner conversation, Monday to Thursday night, with the young dinner server boy who could brighten their day with a story about his school lunches and his spring break vacation with his family to Mexico.

When I moved to college, I thought I was supposed to go make myself into something and be someone and do something—Jesus did it, Buddha did it, every single role model I ever had did it and had to leave their family to do it. Sometimes I imagine a big party in my future when all my life's work after leaving home accumulates and culminates and I am recognized for doing something worthwhile to someone in the world outside my family home, and some woman in a flowing dress on a well-lighted stage with a high-quality microphone hands me a shiny trophy with little wings and says congratulations, thank you for your accomplishment, and I think about all my work and the sacrifices, and you, how it's all proof that leaving you behind was logical, that I am a brother not a parent, that family

raises you but you must become your own person, that I can't grow up where I grew up.

In an alternate scenario I see you shaking in a wheelchair, we are both old now and I am bathing you. You will still grumble about the same things you did when the shaking first started. You will make jokes about being an old grandpa, but now you really are old. All your books and maps about the world will still be in your room, but there will be no trophies of any kind, no winged golden flying metal reflecting the setting sun of your magnificence. And no one will ask about you or about me, and no one will know us, because we will have done nothing but care for each other all our lives. And instead of knowing the world we will know each other. And when we both lie down to die, our life will have been our choice, and I will say, I loved my little brother, and I refused to accept his destiny, because sometimes destiny must be raged against and sometimes love must be unreasonable.

• • •

I watched a little bird die today. His mother sang songs until he died. His little head curled down into his chest and he stopped breathing. His eyes never opened to see the world.

Sometimes gravity plays a trick on little birds before they can open their eyes, sometimes they are pushed out by a selfish older brother, sometimes it is just the wind, blowing wherever it listeth. The birds that fall before their time almost always die—if the impact on the earth doesn't kill them, a predator will find them.

Birds that live to adulthood also make the jump from the nest, but they choose to jump when they think they are ready. The first flights of all birds are the most miraculous of decisions. Only days, weeks, or hours into the world, little birds with hardly their down feathers leap from the safety of their nests to meet the bitterness of the earth.

One of the most awe-inspiring jumpers is the barnacle gosling. A gosling is unable to eat food brought to him by parents, so immediately after birth he must venture to the feeding grounds. However, the grounds are miles from the nest. And barnacle goose nests are built hundreds of feet high on arctic cliffs. Within the first thirty-six hours of life, the barnacle gosling must jump from this cliff.

His down feathers are a small parachute for his lightweight body, but after he jumps he falls and falls until he collides with something—a cliff wall coming down, a bad rotation twists him in the air and he smashes his head on impact, maybe he survives the fall and tumbles over shrapneled rock until a wing or a foot gets ripped or snapped. If he stops falling and he stops rolling and he is still alive, he must avoid predation from waiting fox and watching crow, waddle miles over boulder, snow, ice, crevasse, hole, cavern, fatigue, hopelessness, the unequal and unfair disposition of Nature on his innocent body that desires an equal chance to live—to reach a temporary heaven miles away.

You were fourteen the first time you had a seizure. You fell, blind or featherless or both, and hit the ground and broke your little body. Seven years later, I'm pitying you and turning my eyes from your pain before it becomes mine. I drive and drive and think and think and write essays and ask street preachers and witches to pray for you and I stand at the altars of empty churches, after the night has ended but the webby streetlamp has shone through the window all night, then go shake my hands at the sky because I don't know whom to blame. What did you do? What could I have done? Was it me or God who pushed you out too early and abandoned you?

One summer, during a brief positive lapse in your health, you and I went bird watching. We walked through a dusty braided riverbed looking for nests in trees to sit and watch at dusk. We hadn't seen more than a few crows and vultures all

day, but as we walked back at sunset you stopped. Sand settled in the air. Two American kestrels swooped into treetops. You crouched so as not to disturb them. You looked at me with urgency in your eyes. You told me *Go!—you go! and I'll stay!*—and I didn't take time to think about how this moment or our whole distancing lives might affect you so I left you there, crouched in the sand, watching from a distance as I approached the winged creatures.

I left home for college, jobs, girlfriends, some future I have a shot at—and you've been required to watch as people around you have moved into the next stage of their lives. The places you dreamed of visiting were past the ability of your body, so you put maps of those countries on your walls and studied them as you lay, for days and weeks and months, prostrate, assigned to a bed with a sickness no doctor and no bishop and no stake patriarch can explain.

Maybe this is what we do for the people we love—scrutinize the Fate that disregards our righteous desire. But if I can't protect the people I love from the world, then how is love enough? Why could Jesus heal Mary Magdalene because He loved her, but no matter her faith, Mary could not stop Jesus from the cross or save Him from the tomb? Will our love ever be enough?

Am I prideful or afraid in the face of what I can't control? Is my evolutionary instinct to care for the weak because I, too, am weak alone, and afraid of living beyond the safety of a familial or religious nest? Do I love selflessly, or do I love in order to cope with my existential fear of young adulthood, thrusting myself into the most absorbing type of love and calling that a purpose? Is loving another person just an opportunity to relieve myself of my self? Is all I see when I look at you my own exhaustion and disappointment for what I could have been if I'd been a little more independent and brave? Do I scrutinize your fate because I am tired of trying to figure out mine? Is Fate unfair, or am I just afraid of having faith?

For years I struggled coming home to see you in your wheelchair, or you with Grandpa's donated cane taken shyly out of the closet, or you pulling yourself slobbering and sweating up the stairs using only your arms. But today driving away is harder. Most of the time I drive a few miles away and pull over and cry.

As we wash the bug-plastered windows and scrub the road-worn tires, I can't help as tears work themselves out and I watch you leaning on your cane in the driveway in the camping chair, scanning the sky for birds, scanning the sky for signs, scanning the sky for God. And I've been obliged to think that our will is not entirely our own, and that God sometimes determines the choices we get to choose from, and sometimes we hate them all, and want to curse God, and pose ourselves against Him. And God obstinates to His will because He can call it righteous, and we must cower in our pride, and call ourselves sinful, and stubborn, and arrogant, and humble ourselves to the dirt because we are not magnificent.

But if this Nature is God's love, then I don't understand God or love. Because when I feel the beauty in that sparrow mother singing songs until her baby dies, I know Nature is not vengeful or unjust, only bound by rules. And I know that love is much more powerful than the indifference of evolution, casually selecting who will survive and who will die, and though a little bird may fall and break its neck and back, trees still grow into the rocks of mountains' sides, and elephants migrate in packs through the Sahara Desert where there is no water or comfort except their family members for hundreds of miles, and barnacle goslings leap hundreds of feet over cliffs they can't see the bottoms of and walk for miles over pointy rocks and gaping swallowing holes using their little bruised feet that have no say in whether they slip on snow or outrun foxes or hide from crows as they journey toward the heaven placed so far from safety.

Our Father tells us to jump with the promise that a Savior will intercede before we hit the ground. We trust that in the end all will be made right that is not right, that the lame will walk and the blind will see and the deaf will hear music, the mournful music of sparrow mothers reconciling to the irrefutable will of Nature. But is God any more than a safety in the end? Will He intercede before we hit the ground? Or before we step through thin ice? Or before the fox and crow? Didn't He send the fox and crow? We are destined, or damned, to love, impotent to Nature's intention. And yet, choosing to love in the face of so much overbearing uncertainty is why any of us live on. Because not striving to free and be free accepts a disadvantaged death. Nature is hostile to love—*and we must love*.

And so I gravitate toward your side of the car and wash in places where I know you can reach with the garden hose nozzle, and I let you do your best at trying to wind up the hose on the side of the house, and when you need my help getting up the porch steps I put my arm around your waist, and say heave on three, and we lift, and it is beautiful, it is magic, we lift each other off the ground, two brothers so vastly different, so innately opposed, so changed in love. And when you grumble I tease you, and when we laugh we laugh until your body starts shaking, and I worry if this is the onset of something worse, and when we cry we cry so deeply that our snot drips in the same way down the front of our mustaches, covering our lips with the sweet glaze that is the pain of loving so fiercely that we are angry with God when He curbs a good desire.

And this time as I drive away I do not cry, but the whole time I look up as I cross the plains and the mountains and the desert, I am looking for you, I am waiting for you to join me, I am watching the sky for little birds, and sometimes I see you, when the weather turns and the surviving creatures congregate the air, I see you catching currents and flying freely. One day your life will move beyond the maps on the walls of your room

and your imagination will fill the whole world. One day you will be magnificent.

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ARIANA FEICHKO

Death of Spring

It had been a nice April morning. The type of morning one would spend taking a walk or going to the park with a gaggle of children. Flowers bloomed and pollen danced in the soft air. The sun trickled in through the six large windows below the high-rise ceiling of my family's living room. Discarded dolls and puzzles littered the floor—a floor that had always been a minefield for unsuspecting toes. My sisters, all four of them, gripped worn Xbox controllers in their hands as we sat around the glaring TV. There was a certain mirth in the air: giggles, grins, and the heat of a digitized battle brightened our cheeks. To a ten-year-old girl, nothing could have been more perfect. The weekend had only begun and there was so much to do before Monday. I can't remember what game we were playing; all I remember is the sound of my father's shoes on the wood floor.

My father has always been a loving man who held high expectations for us. He often lingered over our shoulders while we cried over math problems at the kitchen table late at night. When we misbehaved in church, there was a stern reprimand waiting for us at home. Despite this, he never liked to yell at us. The dinner table was always alight with his voice. Stories,

jokes, and gospel lessons bounced from one end of the table to the other, and we simply couldn't get enough. Many of my childhood memories include snippets of gospel teachings and real-world application from my father. Looking back, my father was the perfect mix of parent, teacher, and friend. He loved us with all his heart.

On that bright April morning, when he trudged into the living room, that man was nowhere to be found. His eyes glistened and his nose leaked snot. There was an unfamiliar redness around his eyes and his shoulders sagged. His hands trembled at his sides. Something had broken my strong, stalwart father.

No ten-year-old would have any idea what was going on—I certainly didn't. As he gathered us in his arms, his shaking fingers dug into my shoulder, a certain heaviness buried itself into my chest. A seedling of doubt and concern that would later grow into a heavy tree of resentment and sorrow had laid itself to rest within my heart.

We wouldn't be having another baby sister.

I don't remember my initial reaction. I can only assume I felt some level of shock—perhaps some surprise, sorrow, and confusion. Never before had I *imagined* a baby could die before its first breath. In my mind and heart, only old people could die. As I've grown and experienced life, however, I've learned that Death doesn't discriminate. He comes when he pleases, glaring scythe in hand.

When my mother came home from the doctor's office, there was that same redness around her eyes that had blemished my father's face. It was the same pain and heartache he had failed to hide. My mother has always been more composed than my father. It took great effort to incur her wrath, and she would typically hide her irritation with mild, calming breaths. Though at this moment, her divine strength and poise had disappeared with her sorrow. I could not see my strong-willed mother. That version of her had died with my baby sister.

I remember my sisters not understanding why our parents were so upset. Inara and I, as the oldest, we understood to some small degree. But we were still children after all. Children whose lives had been turned upside down in less than an hour. We had waited five months for our sister, but now we wouldn't be meeting her at all.

"There was no heartbeat," my mother had said. "None at all."

April: the month of spring showers, life, and renewed opportunities. Thousands of poems, novels, and songs have been written about spring. Not that I can blame the poets, the artists, and the songwriters. Every flower bud and blade of grass has enchantment woven into its core. I had always loved spring. The breeze in the air whispered promises of sunshine and gentle rain. After months of dark, dreary winter, it was a nice change of pace. It was hopeful, and I loved it. But as I watched my mother's shoulders curl inward, my love for spring shriveled, withered, and died. Even years later, I cannot look with joy at the little white rosebush my parents bought in remembrance of my sister. I abhor every green bud that pushes past winter's glare. The new growth merely shoves the pain back into my mind and heart again.

I hate spring.

I know I shouldn't hate spring. Easter is a part of spring, and with it, the renewed chance of life and the Savior's Resurrection. There is beauty and love and faith intertwined with spring, something that the Savior possesses in His very being, but there is a certain dichotomy associated with spring as well. Not every newborn bird learns to fly, not every fawn stumbles to its feet and walks, not every child breathes their first breath. Sometimes the blissfulness of April blinds us to the hidden tragedies tucked behind new growth. The Savior had to suffer and die upon the cross in order to bring about the Atonement and Resurrection—without His suffering, there would be no

hope of returning to Heavenly Father. While this should have proved to me that the path through life isn't always happy—but that we should have faith that it can eventually lead us to happiness, my suffering at such a young age turned my heart cold. I learned that although there is a natural order to the world, it doesn't always follow a familiar pattern. The brutal reality of life clawing through the ashes of winter often subverts our expectations. Beautiful white blossoms on an apricot tree can freeze and whither with an early frost; a field of purple tulips could kill the unsuspecting dog or cat. Spring isn't the perfect picture of new life. It's messy and unplanned. Anything can happen.

The days following the loss were blurred and fast paced. I remember hushed conversations and my mother's endless tears. Late nights were spent lying in bed, staring off into the darkness. An unfamiliar ache in my chest kept me up. Everything hurt. Instead of going to my parents or praying for comfort as I had been taught, I suffered in the stillness of my room. I felt like I needed to suffer, that maybe it was something I did that caused my family pain. But I couldn't let my family see my pain. They were hurting, too, and I didn't want them worrying about me. Surely the Lord also had other things to deal with as well, so why should I pray for comfort? It was such a small thing compared to everyone else's problems—why would He even bother?

My sister was not the last to die. Year after year, baby after baby, we endured losses; there were so many that I lost count. I buried the seed of doubt and sorrow, hoping to hide it from the light, but it still sprouted. The tree of resentment caged my heart with its roots and dulled the pain. People say that you become desensitized with enough exposure to tragedy and violence, and I was a veteran.

My parents would hold their breath every time my mother was pregnant. With each pregnancy, we were told to keep it secret in case we lost the baby. No one but our family was supposed to know. During my late teenage years, my parents would

wait to tell us, especially as the losses piled up. There was one pregnancy we didn't even know about until the baby had died; my mother stated it bluntly—no sugarcoating. It was almost as if it were as trivial as the weather. After that, I was no longer fazed by the losses; I came to expect them. *Why have hope where there is none?* I reasoned. *Why try and feel happy for something when it's only going to end in tears?*

For years after the first loss, even with all the subsequent miscarriages and lonely funerals, my parents told me this was all part of God's plan of happiness—that sorrow and pain were a part of life and we were supposed to learn from it so that we could know joy. So that we could help others when they went through hard times. But how could *this* bring us happiness? How could carrying the weight of seven tiny caskets on one's shoulders instill joy? How could God create a "plan of happiness" that included such sorrow? *How could death on a nice spring day lead to eternal happiness? Doesn't the Lord love me?*

"Those were my brothers and sisters!" I howled. "Why would You take them from us? What did we do to deserve this? Tell me, please!"

I can't imagine what Christ was thinking or feeling when He knelt in the Garden of Gethsemane and bled from every pore. I cannot imagine what He was thinking when He was placed on the cross. Some part of me wonders, did His faith ever stutter? Did He believe that everything would be okay, regardless of what happened in the moment? I can't imagine that Christ would have doubted God, but I am imperfect, and I have doubted Heavenly Father more than once, especially in the face of these miscarriages. Sometimes I wish I could have had the unwavering faith of Christ in those dark years, but it was hard to hold on.

Nine years. Nine years since that fateful day in pearly-white April. Middle school came and went, as did high school. I buried myself in my schoolwork. I pushed aside scripture

reading and prayer. The Lord wasn't answering my pleas, so He obviously wasn't listening. All of my energy, then, went to being the best, to bringing joy and pride to my parents; perhaps this could make them happy again, if only for a moment. If I brought success and excitement into our home, maybe we could forget our pain. My parents never stopped loving us. I always knew that. Sometimes, however, it felt like they would stare at me with a far-off gaze, almost like they were reminiscing or dreaming about a future that would never come to pass.

I watched the cycle of the seasons through those dark years. I often measured the year's passage through the trees on my street. Their lives were predictable, and in a way, so was mine. The miscarriages had almost become an annual event, and I could predict one from a mile away. The largest tree on the street was my neighbor's aspen. In the fall, it would shake free of heavy yellow leaves, only for the snow to crush and devour them in the winter. As the days warmed, I would watch green buds come to life next door. The aspen had taken the decaying leaves from the year before and recycled their materials. Decomposition came and nourished the tree with nitrogen-rich nutrients. Life dug past the frigid months and sprouted—a miracle of nature I no longer admired. Years passed in this fashion. I would watch the miracle of life yet I had never felt so detached from it. It was an endless, arduous, and frankly deadening cycle.

I never thought I would receive an answer to why this tragedy had to befall my family. Though I would never wish this on anyone else, I didn't want this pain. Yet that answer cried and wailed to life in the darkness of winter.

Winter: a terrible thing compared to the beauty of spring. Not as many poems have been written about it, and those authors who have written about it often fear and transfigure it into a dreary and terrible monster. Life is meant to shrivel and decay at winter's touch. Plants and animals suffocate in its claws, hidden until spring. They have to die and decompose

for the yellow buttercup to bloom; without this natural recycling of matter, nothing new can grow. Perhaps this is why the scent of decomposing flesh is as sickly sweet as the rose—it alludes to its life-giving properties through false pretenses.

I had never liked winter before, but now I fell to its feet in gratitude. Where life had failed in the daylight of spring nine years earlier, it flourished in the cold night of winter. For the first time in years, that heavy tree whose roots crushed my heart didn't squeeze so hard. My chest felt lighter. My hands shook as I held a small, frail, 5 lb. 8 oz. baby boy in the beginning of February. The day had been dreary, with gray clouds obscuring any sliver of blue sky. A frigid wind that turned your skin dry and thin whispered its mutterings outside of the window, begging to be let in. Piles of snow leaned against the fence. Frozen leaves turned to mulch as the melted snow moistened their surface and tore them to shreds. This was not the picture-perfect image one would imagine life to come out of.

Yet never had I felt such love for another creature. My brother, my brother, had come. Holding him seemed to cut through the twisting roots of doubt around my heart. A small tuft of blond hair had never felt so soft. Nothing had felt lighter than this little gift. Nothing felt real in this moment except the pair of dark eyes that held mine. I remember learning to feed him a bottle; we had to hold him on his side to keep the milk from overwhelming him because he was so weak. I didn't care about the extra precaution because I would have done anything for him. Holding this precious angel in the dead of winter forced all the anger, all the terrible thoughts, all the doubt, and all that pain from my heart. This was healing. This was a new life, and it didn't come from April showers and spring sunshine. It clawed its way through the desolate sands of icy snow and gnarled, decayed forests.

I wanted to love him, to care for him, to protect him because this was an opportunity I had waited years to have. I

would have sacrificed everything if it meant he lived. With this baby in my arms, I understood why we endured such loss. I had been molded, shaped, and prepared by celestial hands to take on the role of caregiver. I was meant to give support to my mother as exhaustion lay heavy on her shoulders. I was meant to comfort those with similar loss and provide them with love and support. I had been transformed into a better version of myself, one who loved without question.

Though as I stared into his dark eyes, tendrils of guilt and anger caressed the cage surrounding my heart. His smile stirred unwanted thoughts and feelings I wished I could suppress. Why did he live while the rest didn't? There is no doubt in my mind that he will learn about the turmoil we endured to get him here. Some part of me wishes he wouldn't, that his innocence could stay intact, but I know that's a hopeless wish. In some part of my mind, I wanted to scream to the heavens in fury. How could a benevolent God let so many die, only for one to live? I know that my siblings are okay, and that they are happy and whole, but it didn't heal that void in my chest. There are people missing from our family, and I can't help but feel angry. Why did death have to hurt so much, even when I had never met my brothers and sisters? How could I believe in a God who uses death as a shaping tool?

Sometimes when I look at him, that old fury ignites again and I feel my faith slipping. Enduring to the end is a slippery slope and the handholds keep disappearing. I'm angry. I'm tired. I'm sad. I wish we had never lost my sister, even if it meant we wouldn't have my brother. Luvinia, the first of many, was the farthest along, the closest to fruition—it would have only been four more months and then she would have been here with us. We could have been happy. I can't help but wonder what her favorite color is, what she likes to do, what she wants to learn —all these things I can't wait to know about my brother. I love him, but it still hurts. I know I will never come to terms with

what happened; at least, not in this lifetime. But looking back, I know that the Savior guided me to the people I needed to meet, to talk to, to laugh with. That is what faith is—feeling that you have been abandoned but trusting that someone is still there watching over you. It's taken me nearly a decade to discover that truth.

Spring has not been my favorite season for years. I appreciate its beauty, but its colors and sensations are dull. Flowers grin as I pass by, but I duck my head and ignore their calls. Spring's simple beauties have lost their allure. Their existence did not come from comfort: mulch and decay opened the way for green buds and grasses. Death had to come first to pave their path. It took effort and loss for the daisy and plum to breathe. The result of that suffering and death, however, is priceless. Nothing could compare to the joy I felt on that cold day in February, which seemed to sparkle and shine brighter than any April morning. In that moment, nothing mattered save for those big, dark eyes staring deep into my own. And for the first time in years, I felt the true power of the Savior's love for me—something I have tried to hold onto ever since.

SAMUEL CHARLES

Forks That Bend

At this point, I know plastic forks a little too well. I know the sizes, designs, and how much they try to imitate real metal silverware. I often have salads for lunch with my dad, a college professor, and we know all the best places on campus to get forks. We also know that every time you get a plastic fork, especially the ones from his office, you have to get a couple extra because, without fail, one brittle, spindly spear will snap, leaving you with just a trident. Those are for ruling the seas, not stabbing lettuce. With every snapped tine, you have to pull wide thorns of clear plastic out of your teeth like bone out of chicken. Recently, however, I found a better fork spot, right next to the bagels in the university minimart. These forks are a little smaller and more cheaply made, but now I get them every time because of one absolutely crucial difference: they can *bend*. These forks are not imitating gleaming silver or the hardest of hard forks. When under pressure, the plastic will bend, stretch, fold out along edges and then straighten right back. It might be a little harder to stab the spine of a lettuce leaf without that faux-metal stiffness, but you can always try again, every time, because for these forks, there is no snapping under pressure. There is only a durable, malleable, optimal *flex*.

Khabarovsk, Siberia, Russia
March 18, 2020
Days in Quarantine: 1
Total Missionaries: 65

> We found out today that we're going into quarantine from Coronavirus! We thought some of us were going home, but I think we're all staying. Though the Church is sending a lot of missionaries home throughout the world, which is interesting. Because we're in quarantine we get phones! Mine is pretty nice—first smartphone I've ever had! President Lamb called and said this will last two to ten weeks, probably closer to two. We joked about the ten weeks part. That would be crazy! It'll be a little rough just waiting through quarantine, but soon it'll be over and we'll get back to work. I'll probably play some guitar, draw, exercise. We might play some games or watch some Church movies. Even though our phones only have a few apps —even FamilySearch and Facebook are illegal in Russia—at least we can practice Russian on Duolingo. I even bought a few treats to ration for myself and help tide me over. I can do two weeks. It sounds kind of fun!

Though I am a human and not a fork, I identify with the salad pressure these forks are faced with. My parents, grandparents, and assorted great-grandparents, aunts, and uncles are university professors, many high achieving and prominent. In the midst of that, I am a college student: first year, largely inexperienced with life, school, relationships, and the universe. That's like being a caterpillar in a family of butterflies, or a cadet at the front end of generations of five-star generals.

With that heritage comes many great things (a half-tuition scholarship being one of my favorites), but also a necessity for greatness in learning and academic achievement, in ambition and dreams, and, at BYU, in spirituality. That can be very hard. There is no easy option for me, no dream of kicking back my legs to relax. I push and I push to be better and better, to get this fat caterpillar to butterfly-level achievement, all on short, stubby legs and no wings whatsoever.

Vladivostok, Siberia, Russia
July 7, 2020
Days in Quarantine: 111
Total Missionaries: 40

I had my first interview with our new mission president today. He's cool, but . . . he wants us to start using social media and things during quarantine, do more lessons with members, etc. I want to tell him to just wait! Quarantine will be over soon—then we can actually do the work. He wasn't very impressed when I told him I had made it to Diamond League on Duolingo. Maybe it's 'cause he's Russian, a real Moscow businessman. That's probably why he told us we have to wear our full suits in the house even though we can only leave for an hour a day. Why?! That's just making us hot and uncomfy for no reason.

A mission is lonelier than I could have ever imagined, especially now in quarantine. Today I was writing and wrote down "Lord, I'm trying with all I have." And then I started crying. I turned off the lights and closed the door and just cried for like an hour. I want to want to be

> here. I miss myself so bad. I haven't been myself in eight months. Every day here is the same, and I feel like I am not doing anything.
>
> But I played guitar and talked with Turner and Kuhl. That helped a bit. Even Zhivoy had some jokes in his broken English, and that was fun. We laughed at the concept of "two–ten weeks in quarantine." That sounds like a breeze.
>
> We joked about buying an Xbox. We won't, but just . . . nobody would know. No one. President is more than 2,000 miles away—that's pretty much New York to LA. The nearest missionaries are in South Korea, I think, or maybe northern Japan. The closest country is China and then North Korea—I could probably walk there in a day or two. Nobody would know. No one.

Those clear, snappy forks are designed after harsh, unyielding metal, but that's not what plastic is made for. Plastic, if made in a certain way, can yield, can change and adapt to varying situations. I have seen people—adults, my close friends, and even myself—keep pressure in and on themselves and force an unyielding, rigid, white-knuckle hold on life and their journey through it. That's not necessary. God made me the way I am, with interests and hobbies and needs, so that I can bend. That is a strength. Adaptation in the face of adversity is often seen as weakness, submitting before pressure, but a facade harder than diamonds often hides fragility, subsurface cracking, and a deadly, searing brittleness. I don't want to crack. I don't want to break. If I limit myself to a rigid hold, I will actually be more vulnerable than if I can let go, glide with the pressure, and slip myself back together every time.

Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia
January 30, 2021
Days in Quarantine: 318
Missionaries Left: 25

I've learned to love the time we spend outside. There's not a lot of it, so it becomes really special. I love the snow, and the streets—everything is muffled and calm. It's -27 degrees C today. I wore my black striped scarf, though I like the purple knit one more. I felt like an anime character with just my eyes showing between my scarf, mask, beanie, hood, and fur. I'm just glad it's not -40 again—President makes us stay inside if it's below -30.

I bought a yogurt and Bounty bar at the store today. I'd never had those before my mission, but that little treat every day makes me a little happier. I'm learning to cherish that little bit. We walked through the park before our hour outside was up, and the frost from my breath crystalized on my eyelashes and hair again.

We had a couple Zoom lessons today, and Elder Dart's Russian is getting better. It feels a bit like having a trainee (not that I'd know what that felt like) even though we were in the MTC at the same time. We get roped into three-hour-long philosophical discussions about nonsense (today's topic: why I need more male friends. Elder Scott laughed at that one) but honestly, passing the time between lessons with something I think is bonding us isn't the worst. It's better than sitting on Facebook watching videos. I'm trying some new

> things to stay focused, and I'm excited to see how they work. It's hard to focus on anything with so much time.
>
> I remember Elder Williams saying it was so hard to get up on time in quarantine because if you sleep in, there's less day to deal with. I almost cried when he said that. There's always so much day to deal with.

If God is the master, then we are the tools. While quoting Zenos in the allegory of the olive trees, Jacob writes, "And it came to pass that the master of the vineyard went forth, and he saw that his olive tree began to decay; and he said: I will prune it, and dig about it, and nourish it, that perhaps it may shoot forth young and tender branches, and it perish not. And it came to pass that he pruned it, and digged about it, and nourished it according to his word" (Jacob 5.4–5). We are given the opportunity on this earth to be those tools in His hands to help other people. Well, I believe God wants me to be a fork, and I want, with all my heart, not to snap; God didn't ask me to be a trident. If I can only bend, twist, and roll with the punches, then I can perform my function again and again. Not by being hard or stoic, forcing upon myself the rigid and brittle characteristics of a gleaming metal silver fork, but by embracing my plasticity and using it to my advantage. A silver fork can't do what I do. It wasn't made to. I was made to bend, and that allows me to serve God to the fullest. God's got plenty of silverware and I assume He has tridents. But God wants me to bend.

Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia
July 27, 2021
Days in Quarantine: 496
Missionaries Left: 9

Today was a little rough.

I talked to President about going to an art museum today. I thought that, since we only have nine missionaries and it's been, I don't know, sixteen something months, that we could finally go? It would be the first Russian . . . anything we've seen since the beginning of quarantine.

When I came here, I thought I'd get to go to the opera. I thought I'd get to go to the Russian ballet. I wanted to go see museums, monuments, memorials. There's an awesome planetarium outside the city, but public transportation's not allowed, so that idea got nixed pretty fast. They even have a Soviet firefighting museum here! You never know you're interested in Soviet firefighting until you can't go to that museum. The St. Petersburg missionaries sent me a video of them at a basketball game.

So my plan was to go at 10:00 a.m. on a Monday, the whole mission or district or whatever we are would all be in masks, it'd be super safe, etc. The museum is across the street from the mission home. I gave him my district leader /AP/whatever-I-am-now honor-bound promise. Y'know what he said?

"Elder Charles, what would be the benefit of that?"

Are you kidding? It's been sixteen months in quarantine. I have worked with these nine missionaries for months and months, with some of them for almost two years. Everyone is struggling. I couldn't even find the words to question or respond. How can he not see?

Later I told him that quarantine was the hardest thing I'd ever done. He laughed and said that when he was on his mission, his mission was the hardest thing he'd ever done, too. Looking back, I would have said, "No, my mission is fine. I love my mission. Quarantine is the hardest thing I've ever done."

I'm humbled as I remember Leonid, who just got baptized. He never said much, but his testimony grew. Big Mike still hadn't stopped drinking ("Only two bottles. It's for good dreams!"), but he's reading his scriptures every day, so that's good. Best of all, Yaroslav is speaking in sacrament meeting next week! This might be the hardest thing I've ever done, but it's also the best.

I messed around with Williams and Edvalson a bit. They're hilarious. A couple rounds of chess and singing a few of my new songs helped me calm down. They're not all sad songs anymore. I had some of that Russian apple juice I love. I wrote in my journal. I remember feeling a similar way yesterday evening, and recognizing then, too, the calming and refreshing nature of these little routines. Tomorrow I can start again, and hopefully fix something I messed up today.

Elder Williams cooked something delicious and Edvalson taught me some more kinesthetics—archer push-ups today. I'm trying to get to a one-armed push-up, among other things. I still haven't beaten my 8-minute 30-second plank record, but I'm getting close. I went 7 minutes the other day. I drew a self-portrait the

> other day, too—it was me on the Red Square in Moscow, a conglomeration of a few different pictures I have. I wish I could go there, but, y'-know, a drawing is good enough for now. I'm getting pretty good at it, too.

This life was never made to be a one-time thing. We don't show up, do one cool deed, and then qualify for heaven. Christ's Atonement enables us to try again and again so we can learn and grow and adapt. If I shatter on the first go, I'm finished. "I can't do it," I'd say. "Those beautiful silver forks over there are so good at stabbing salad, but not me. Now I'll have to rule the seas." The seas are overrated, and so are metal forks. Instead, I'll feel the pressure, adjust, and move forward. After that, I'll do it again. I'll learn and become better over hundreds of thousands of trials because every time, after every one, Christ gave me a chance to learn, a chance to pull back after bending, slip into place, and move forward again.

> Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia
> October 12, 2021
> Days in Quarantine: 573
> Total Missionaries: 9 + 14 = 25!
>
> I had my final interview with President today. We talked about going home. My brother, Ben, leaves in a week or so for his mission to Moscow—I can't believe he got called to Russia, too. I'm gonna get to see him for about a week before he leaves. There will be two Elder Charleses for a day. The decision to see him and leave three weeks early was humbling–I realized it wasn't because I wanted to leave. It was to see Ben and to help him. And I know he'll

struggle, we all do, but, I mean, Moscow with no quarantine? He's gonna have a blast.

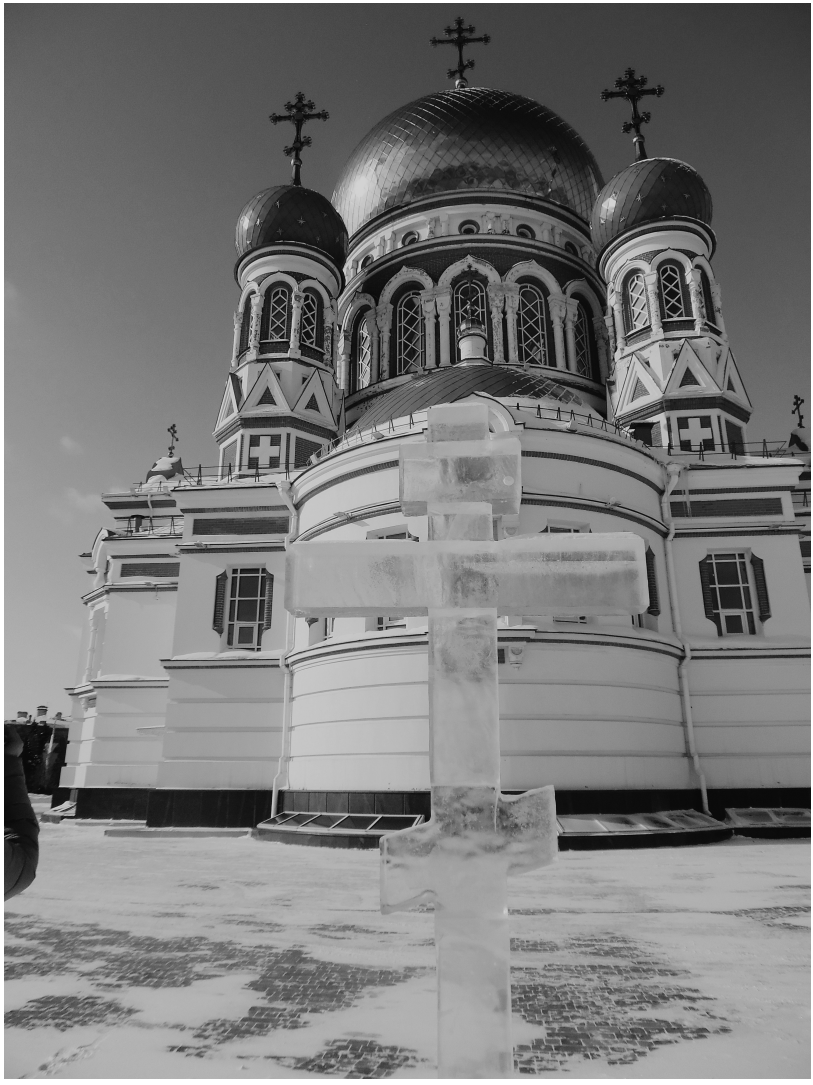
There's been a weird feeling recently since the new missionaries got here. We haven't had new people in nineteen months, so we don't totally know what to do with them. We've been training Elder Pond on the financial stuff and trying not to speak Russian too fast for him and Elder Billings. Watching them, I've had a weird sense of passing the torch, like God's telling me my work here is done. This will continue without me, with new people going through new challenges and dealing with it in their own way.

I think on Monday we're actually going to the zoo! I didn't believe it at first. That'll be the first time I've been . . . well, anywhere, really, since March 2020. I'll head to the airport and fly out just a few hours after that. Nineteen months . . . nineteen months and we're finally opening up. It's weird to be leaving home. I'm glad the new missionaries can street contact now, and I hope they go to the museums. They are starting to go to church again, and I think soon they can actually live in the cities they in serve for the first time in years.

I don't really feel prepared for what's ahead, but I'm excited. I have albums to record, plank records to shatter, art to create, and (finally!) people to meet. More importantly, I'm closer to God than ever before. I'm okay. No, I'm really good, actually. I'm happy. A year ago, I couldn't remember what that means.

Even those plastic forks, when left under pressure for a long time, will settle in that pattern. They begin to revert to that form, not the regular parallel-pronged shape. They've forgotten what it was like without the pressure, and can't initially move back to where they are supposed to be. But with time and patience, skewed curves can be straightened and perform their remembered function, always over and over and over again.

My dad laughs at me when I stare at forks too long and tell him how I relate to them. He laughs harder when I speak to him in a Russian accent or praise the salty Russian seafood salads. I'll make some for him one of these days, stabbing shrimp and scooping cheap caviar with a flexible fork that bends against my plate. He started learning Russian on Duolingo since two of his sons have been called there. I help him with his pronunciation and we laugh when it seems like the stress is always on an unexpected syllable. *Vla-DI-mir, BA-bush-ka, Bor-IS*. These little things bring me happiness, those tiny moments. He still prefers the faux metal forks (the closest to his office) and takes several in case of an accidental trident, but I always make sure to go grab my one flexible plastic fork because I know it won't break on me. Instead, it'll just bend.



MAURI POLLARD JOHNSON

Translating Russia

It's February of 2022 and Russia is threatening to invade Ukraine. My husband checks the news for updates on this dispute every day, multiple times a day. I know that there are many problems with the Russian government—the Russian government is a problem (*the* problem)—but I don't want to hear his disdain for the country. I don't want to hear that it's a horrible place, that the people are heartless and inherently evil, that, in his words, "We should just nuke the whole country."

I lived in Russia for a year and a half. I know people there. I have laughed with them, conversed with them, wept with them, sipped hot tea with them on sweltering summer evenings—which is to say, I have loved them.

• • •

Since returning home to the States, people often ask me what Russia was like, which feels overwhelming and impossible to answer unless I am able to somehow transport them with me back to the streets lined with Soviet-Era gray buildings and sherbet sunset skies. I know these people are curious to see if reality lines up with the truths that they were handed

in American-made movies about spies and communists and stone-faced assassins spitting venomous-sounding words at each other in an alien language.

I remember having that curiosity, too.

• • •

Essayist Valeria Luiselli wrote that "language breaches our direct relationship with the world, and words are an attempt to cross the unbridgeable gap" (qtd. in Houser). The language we speak carries more than straight-across definitions. Language is more than words and their meanings—it's our connection to the living, to what exists outside of us, to something deeper than verbal communication.

• • •

On the evening of February 23, 2022, while I was removing my makeup, washing my face, and preparing for bed, Vladimir Putin initiated an unprovoked attack on Ukraine. My husband turned on the news as the chaos ensued and we watched until our eyes were dry and exhausted and drooping. Constant updates on the continuous bombings throughout Ukraine were at our fingertips during the days following. Americans were (still are) infuriated. I was (still am) infuriated. And my heart broke (still breaks) for the Ukrainians who are waking not to a beautiful winter sunrise, but to smoke and explosions and fear. My heart broke for the destruction, impending trauma, emotional turmoil awaiting them. It broke for the loss of family, of life, of country, of home.

But it also broke for the goodness in the Russian people that Americans are so rarely able to see, and now are even less likely to see. In the days after the attack, one Russian friend posted on her social media saying, "I feel ashamed of my government making decisions like this. I didn't choose this government."

Another wrote, "Russian people don't want war with Ukraine, don't want Crimea, don't want Donbass. Russian people want peace and justice inside of their own country. But I don't know who in the whole world would even listen to us at this point."

• • •

We speak often of language barriers—those metaphysical walls that stand not only between understanding, but also between connection. We feel isolated when our words fail to convey our intended meaning to others. The roots of the word *metaphor* come from the Greek words for "carrying" and "transfer." Its literal meaning is "to carry over." Our words—our language—is a metaphor for our interior lives: our thoughts, emotions, beliefs, confusions, worries, values.

A carrying over of our selves, of our souls.

• • •

The things I knew about Russia before I lived there were mostly adjectives (cold, gray, frozen, deadly), mostly images (the Sochi Winter Olympics, a shirtless Putin atop horses and bears and tigers, cities covered in ice and dirty snow), mostly reductions of stereotypes (communism, kidnapping, violence, crime, war).

The things I knew about Russia after living there are filled with life, with specifics rather than generalities, with whole, complete, expansive truths rather than single stories. For example: Russians are extremely cognizant of their health—they believe you will get sick if your bare feet touch the cold floor, or if you go outside without a hat or a scarf, or that eating spoonfuls of jam helps you feel better when you are sick. Cars will always stop for pedestrians. Sauces like ketchup, mayonnaise, sour cream, mustard, barbecue sauce all come in squeezable bags. The elderly brag about their age—the older the better. Every name has a long version and a shortened version, and a patro-nymic

name, too, comes from a very small pool of names (*Sasha, Masha, Sveta, Nadezhda, Oleg, Ivan, Nikolai, Maria, Alexei, Lyobov*, etc.). The toilet paper is colored and scented. They put dill on everything. They put mayo on everything. If you sit on the ground (especially the cold ground) you will go infertile. They celebrate New Year's like Christmas. Ambulances are free. They love Sting. Wedding receptions are more like parties. They shred butter and put it on top of cakes instead of frosting. During the week of Maslenitsa, Russians consume only thin, crepe-like *bleenie*. Clean shoes are a sign of a good wife. You shouldn't shake hands through a doorway. Every city shares the same street names (*Lenina, Molodezhnaya, Sovetskaya, Popova, Oktyabrskaya, Pushkina, Gagarina*, etc.). Bounce houses everywhere. Sushi places everywhere. Pizza places everywhere. Sushi and pizza places, together, everywhere.

• • •

It's difficult for me to feel the contradicting emotions inside of me.

When I think of Ukrainians—men leaving their families to fight, women sitting on stools in the streets mixing up Molotov cocktails, metro stations bursting with civilians taking refuge, sleeping on the floor, huddling close—I can't dwell on their reality for too long without feeling like I might burst from the swelling tears.

When I think of the Russians—the good, humble people who can hardly afford to feed themselves some days, who live in small, broken apartments, the men who are required to serve in the military for at least one year no matter how much they don't want to be there, the people who have family members in Ukraine, who are unsure how they will be able to live when their economy breaks—I am flooded with even more tears. They burst from me in unexpected moments of stillness.

• • •

According to the hermeneutic approach to language translation, *understanding*, as opposed to mere *comprehension*, takes time. It takes more than simply reading words on a screen or passively listening to a voice-over on a video. Understanding requires engagement. It requires self-reflection. It requires the time to understand our own background and contexts *in which* we are interpreting, as well as the background and contexts *of which* we are interpreting.

Language carries history in its intonations and signifiers—a history and context that is required for a whole, complete understanding.

• • •

It's true what most foreigners believe—that Russian people hardly smile while commuting on an *avtobus* or *tramvai* or *marshrutka*, that no one says "good morning" when you pass them on the streets or smiles a "thank you" when you hold the door open at the grocery store.

But the metaphors are true as well. Russian people are coconuts, they are M&Ms, they are hedgehogs: hard exterior, crisp shells, prickly backs; sweet inside, smooth inside, soft underneath. I have a collection of strangerly-kindnesses that I witnessed while in Russia, and it is these moments—when people around me reduce the Russian people to the harshness of their stereotypes—I quickly recall when asked about my time in Russia:

Once, passengers on a bus shouted for the bus driver to stop when an elderly woman realized she had just missed her stop but was too quiet to speak up. The driver pulled over to the side of the road and five people helped her slowly down the steps of the bus and onto the sidewalk.

Once, while lost on the streets of a large city, a woman we asked for directions walked with us for twenty minutes to help us find what we were looking for.

Once, in a taxi, in the winter, the car next to us honked, pulled up next to our taxi and rolled down his window, all just to tell me that my waist-length hair was stuck in the door and blowing freely out in the open air.

Once, after taking a taxi home with our groceries (which we usually carried the two miles back to our apartment) because our groceries were so heavy that we could barely lift the Ikea-sized bags off the ground (let alone carry them up the four flights of stairs in our apartment building), a man we did not know, and had never seen before, and would never see again, saw us struggling to lift the bags, and asked which floor we lived on, and if he could help carry them, and then proceeded to take the bags and run (seriously, run) up the flights of stairs with the bags of groceries we could barely lift. Then he left, without saying another word to us. I was convinced he was an angel.

• • •

I felt sick watching the videos posted online of the raw and unfiltered footage of cities demolished, burning, crumbling. My husband showed me first-day footage from a Ukrainian kitchen as a missile soared over the houses outside the window and struck nearby: there's a sonic rush, the camera shakes, the family gathered in the kitchen are chattering in worried confusion. Then the strike. Then the shouting. Then a baby began to cry.

Then I began to cry.

• • •

Most people are surprised to hear me say that in place of stone-faced women and threatening men, Russia is full of *babushki*. These old women are truly the face of Mother Russia in the way they perch on little stools along the sidewalks selling buckets full of flowers or berries or vegetables from their gardens, the way they sit on benches gossiping about people's

children they've never met, the way they always set out cookies with tea, the way they call their cats with a noise like tree leaves rustling in a summer breeze, and consistently wear shirts and skirts of two extremely different mismatched patterns.

I think of Lyudmila, who fed us sauteed eggplant on fresh baked bread and gave us chocolates on my birthday and carefully bandaged up my bleeding heel after my new shoes had rubbed it raw.

Karina, who would let me sit in front of her as she gently brushed my hair and crafted it into braided hairdos that could have qualified as works of art.

Valentina, who served us hot tea on a summer night.

Alyona, who invited us over for *bleenie* on Thanksgiving and played the national anthem as we ate.

And I think of all the babushki we befriended or met briefly on the streets, who stopped to bestow upon us blessings of love and health and handsome husbands and many children and lifelong happiness.

• • •

I think that it is so hard for me to watch these videos because the language barrier is stripped away. The cries of fear and sorrow and grief hit me without the protective layer of English subtitles on the screen. They hit me with a full-force blow, without anything to slow them down.

• • •

There's something about translation that never quite works. Not to say that translation isn't important for relaying information, just that it's incomplete. It's limited. Translation is the process of moving from one language to another, but something is lost along its journey: subtle meanings, nuanced understandings, underlying emotions. I think that's something you understand

once you become near-fluent in another language: just how inadequate translations of that language are.

• • •

There was a picture being passed around on Twitter: a text conversation between a Russian mother and her soldier son. The innocence of the messages is gut-wrenching. *Why have you not answered for so long? Dad wants to know if we can send you a package*. The way her son avoids answering her questions: *Are you really still in training? Then where are you?* These are the moments that are often lost amidst the videos and images of destruction and grief. Many acquaintances I have talked with don't realize that young Russian men have not chosen to be there. Many, if not most, of the soldiers do not know why they are there, do not want to be there, lack the fervor and intensity that is typical, especially of American military servicemen. I would bet that most of the Russian soldiers in Ukraine just want to go home.

The text chain ends with these words from the soldier: *Mom, I'm in Ukraine. There is a genuine war here. I am scared. We are bombing all of the cities, together. Even targeting civilians. We were told that they would welcome us and they are falling under our armored vehicles, throwing themselves under the wheels and not allowing us to pass. They are calling us fascists. Mama, this is so hard.*

But because I speak Russian, I know that there are multiple Russian versions of that phrase, *This is so hard*, depending on the emotion you are trying to convey. The word used here is *tyazhalo*, meaning heavy. Directly translated, the young soldier's version of *This is so hard* reads *This is so heavy to me*.

The text is shown on a shattered screen—the last message this mother's son ever sent her.

• • •

According to the Interpretive Theory of Translation, translation from one language to another is not a direct process, but triangular. A language is translated into a sense, and then from sense into another language. It is translated into a sense, meaning the essence, meaning the slight differences in one chosen word instead of another, meaning the difference between "hard" and "heavy."

To truly grasp the sense of the language in order to carry it over into another, one requires a deep knowledge of who is speaking, including their culture, their background, their soul's essence.

• • •

I have a reverence for the Russian language—which at one time, for me, conjured up the destruction in *Red Dawn* or the brutality of spies in the *Mission Impossible* films. But now, the Russian language brings to mind the many idioms and sayings that are so common and so delightful in their direct translations: *Takiyeh perogee*, which literally means "Those kinds of pies," but really means "That's life"; *Bleen*! which literally means "Pancake!" but really means "Shit!"; *Skolko lyet, skolko zeem*, which literally means "How many summers, how many winters," but really means "It's been so long since I've seen you"; *Neechevo Strashnovo*, which literally means "Nothing scary," but really means "No worries"; *Bood Zdarova kak korolyova*, which literally means "Be healthy like a queen," but really means "Bless you"; and my favorite (which I first heard from a Russian mother to her complaining child), *Patamoo shto pacheemoo zaklyoochaetsa na oo*, which literally means "Because why ends with a y," but really means "Because I said so."

A sociolinguistic approach to translation places society and culture as inseparable from one's choice and use of language: the connection between context and meaning is binding. In this paradigm, a both the translated and the translators

are inseparable from their own sociocultural background. Without this understanding, the translator is incapable of carrying over the pure essence of what (who) is being translated.

• • •

In the Russian language, certain letters change to their softer equivalent to avoid making a harsh sound. For example, "ah" becomes "yah," or "oo" becomes "you." The *myaki znak* is a letter whose only function is to soften the letter before it, to make it gentler. Language, sound, and rhythm are treasures in Russia. The melodious cadence of poetry is especially treasured. Any born-and-raised Russian can recite Pushkin poems from memory—they begin the memorization in kindergarten. In December, the weeks leading up to *Nohvi Gohd*, Russian children sit with *Ded Moroz* and instead of asking him for gifts, they recite a poem by heart.

The softness in their words mirrors the softness of their souls.

• • •

There is a fault line running through my heart. It is becoming a chasm.

• • •

While teaching Russian to a group of young adult volunteers who would soon venture off into the realm of the Mother Russia, one of my students asked why certain vowels change to their softer version when placed next to certain consonants. I paused for a moment, I reflected on the eighteen months that I lived there, the people I met, the culture that had grown so dear to my heart, the language that I no longer associate with dictators and war criminals or treasonous spies, but with softhearted babushki and charitable men and women and children

playing on playgrounds and wildflowers sprouting up against the cracked sidewalks and tea cookies and the smell of freshly baked bread and Russian Orthodox churches ornately decorated with gold and candy shops and pastry shops and fruit shops and flower shops and friends who will walk across town to return the purse you forgot or will ride with you on a bus back to the city so you don't get lost and strangers who will give you their hats and scarves if you don't have your own, and I thought about all this, and probably more, and then I responded: "It might sound like a very harsh language, but Russians want to preserve its softness."

• • •

It's now been a year since Ukraine was first invaded, and I'm still not sure how to deal with this situation that is still so *tyazhalo*—so slowly crushing my bones made fragile from knowing another culture and another language so deeply.

But I would pass this fragility on to others if I could—to those who don't understand.

There's something irreplaceable about being able to encounter someone through their own language. And although our advanced technology allows for immediate interpretation or translation, there's something about translation that doesn't quite work the way we think it does. Not to say that translation doesn't relay understanding, just that it's incomplete. It's limited.

Translation in its Latin roots means moving something from one place to another—a carrying over. But there's an essence that is lost along this journey: subtle meanings, nuanced understandings, raw emotion. There are some things that don't make it past the language barrier or across the unbridgeable gap. But this we are used to. Because writing, too, is a translation: a metaphor, a carrying over—of emotion, of experience, of interiority. Like translating foreign languages, writing can't replicate these experiences with exactness. But it gets us closer.

So maybe this is how it works: we write, we read, we try. We use translation as we attempt to make the unbridgeable gap so small we can hardly see it.

And then we carry over as much as we can.

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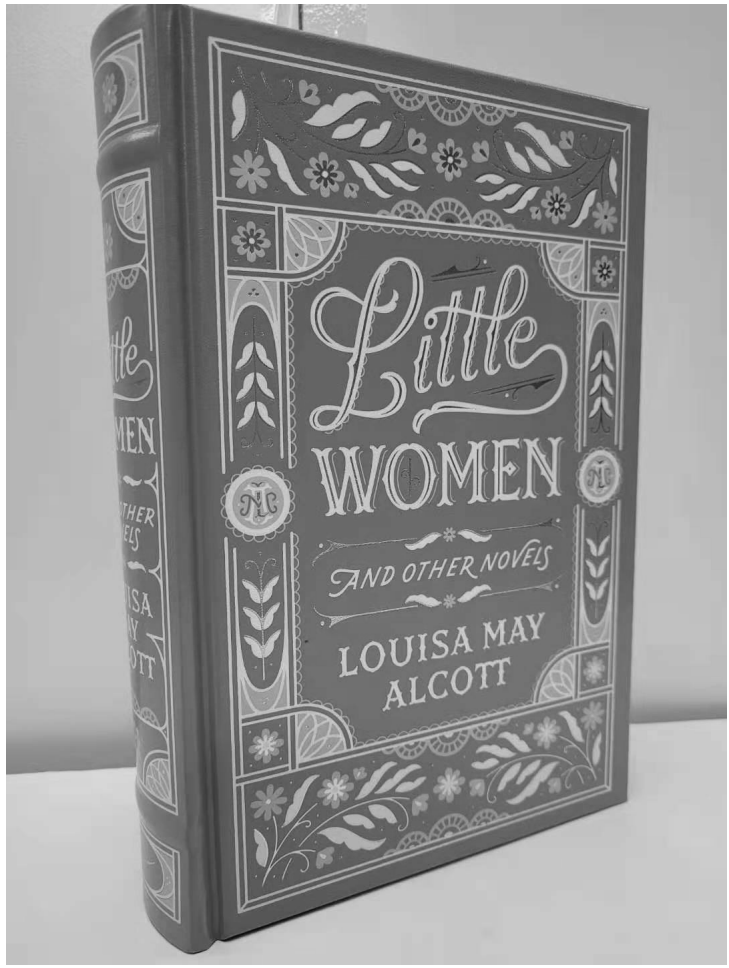
Little
WOMEN
AND OTHER NOVELS
LOUISA MAY
ALCOTT

EDEN WILLIAMS

Little Women

> "Oh, my girls, however long you may live,
> I never can wish you a greater happiness than
> this!" (Alcott)

Sunday mornings shouldn't feel like a weekly battle against all things sane and sensible. Yet there we were, all six of us, sitting reverently in the pew pretending we were not just previously consumed by the chaos that comprised getting ready for church. I shook hands with some elderly members of our ward, smiling as they complimented my sisters and me on our Sunday best appearances and smiling faces. "Just like *Little Women*," they would always say. Would they still believe we earned that title if they had witnessed the aforementioned chaos? If only they knew the tears shed over tightly braided hair, the anxious hours spent waiting for the bathroom, or the countless accusations of stolen dresses and missing jewelry. Our voices that "always sing the hymns so beautifully" were previously used for squealing and squabbling. Did the March sisters argue over who used the last of the shampoo? Did Jane Austen write the Bennet sisters to be bubbly and boisterous? I don't think Tevye

from *Fiddler on the Roof* would've been very happy with his daughters if they spent the Sabbath in sweatpants and T-shirts. Sometimes I felt guilty for not always acting the role I believed I was meant to play. Sometimes those comments in church on how we all looked identical made me feel like just another piece of a nesting doll set. But I hid those reservations behind my smile and cheerfully responded, "Yep, that's us. *Little Women*."

Having all sisters was all I'd ever known. I never thought it to be strange or out of the ordinary. And perhaps it wasn't, but when there are six of you it seems to be the topic of conversation for most strangers. Most of the time I didn't mind it. I was happy to recite where I fell in the order, who looked the most like each other, or what the biggest age gap was. But there was sometimes a comment or question I was not particularly thrilled to respond to.

"Oh, your poor father. He must be just aching for a son."

"How is the hard work getting done in the house? Who are the heavy lifters?"

"I wouldn't want to be the boyfriend dealing with all those sisters!"

They never seemed to be satisfied with my answers. Apparently, it was hard to believe our father was perfectly content with the children he already had. Had God decided for some reason there was too much estrogen in the house, our father always said he wouldn't even know what to do with a boy. It seems he was the perfect candidate to be a loving father to all girls.

Despite the belief of outsiders that a lack of sons leads to a lack of productivity, we grew up knowing how to work. Ironically, those who preached the importance of labor rejected the fruit from ours. According to them, we shouldn't be the ones mowing the lawn or moving furniture, except as a last resort. I recall one Labor Day, the young men in our ward were asked to take down the flags flying in everyone's yards. After none of the boys showed up, my father, the Young Men's president at the

time, rounded up his gaggle of girls, loaded us in the back of a truck, drove us around the countryside, and together we conquered the job. Even though we proved our hands were often just as capable if not more so than those of sons and brothers, it was still a common assumption that had the boys shown up, their work would've been faster, cleaner, and overall better. At the end of the day, I tried not to let those biases get to me because I knew that whatever tasks were thrown at us could be turned into a game, most likely one that included singing Disney tunes, and could be completed without the help of a neighbor boy.

Speaking of boys, it's no surprise that my sisters and I had our fair share of daydreams about meeting our Prince Charming. We would often roleplay different scenarios of that magical day dressed accordingly in glittery gowns and drowned in our father's suit coats. Consequently, if one of us ever brought someone home, we would expect nothing less of such a suitor for our esteemed sister. Some succeeded, but many failed. This was not on account of ruthless nit-picking by us, but rather a lack of respect on his part. There were several occasions when talking to a boy one of us would answer a question about our family, and the shocking news that we had five sisters reached his ear. It was one thing to see his eyes widen in fear, but it was another to watch an arrogant smirk creep across his face followed by a smug remark either along the lines of, "Well, at least I have more options if something goes wrong," or "Imagine having to date a girl with all those sisters."

Even though conversations like this happened over and over again, there were many people in my life that weren't disrespectful or assuming about my family background. I knew that those who did choose to remark usually didn't mean to offend and had good intentions of making light-hearted conversation. But for years because of those interactions, I couldn't shake the feeling that I was part of something that wasn't normal, fully functional, or complete.

I found out on Christmas morning 2011 that my youngest sibling was going to be a baby girl. I don't remember one single present I received that year. But I'll never forget the little pink stocking that mysteriously appeared on the fireplace and the giggling excitement that arose after its discovery. Even though this would be the sixth time genetics decided on another girl, I wasn't one bit surprised by the uncanny coincidence. All my biology classes taught me that what determined gender was always a fifty-fifty chance and that my family was no exception. That is what I put on my tests, that is how I explained it to others, and that is what I told myself that Christmas morning. And yet I never quite believed it. It affected my life far too much for it to be a product of mere coincidence. As Albert Einstein put it in a letter to Max Born: "I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* does not throw dice." If it was pure chance, what were the odds it would happen so many times in a row? But if it was God's choice, why did I feel ashamed and defined by that part of my identity when strangers brought it up in the grocery store?

As the years went by and girlhood turned to womanhood just as summer turns to autumn, I realized that I lived in a world that sometimes treated women very differently than the world I grew up in, a world where my mother and father gave their little girls all the love and respect they needed and deserved. It took me a while to understand why my parents were so concerned whenever we visited an unfamiliar place with unfamiliar people. I couldn't comprehend some of the things my older sisters cried over until I found myself crying for the same reasons years later and my heart sank to think my little sisters would have to one day shed the same tears. In some form or another, every girl or woman has experienced injustice solely because of the gender that was divinely appointed to her. Being part of my family of little women has opened my eyes to these issues and has lit a fire in my heart that I don't believe would've sparked under any other "normal" family circumstance, a fire

that yearns for more compassion and understanding in this world towards all of God's children.

"Why are you so feminist sometimes?" a friend once bluntly asked me. The surrounding context was a conversation regarding the role of an LDS mission president and his wife and how I believed her duties were just as vital as his. My response to that friend was a reminder of whom I grew up with. Autumn, the oldest, was the trailblazer of the family. She always had five little apprentices in awe of her every move and even with that daunting task on her shoulders she never shied away from doing what was right. Emma was a book full of mystery and intellect. Though often closed off on the outside, within her pages thrived absolute affluence of stories and knowledge. Lydia added a new element to the group with her curious and innovative personality. I dare say that we have all envied her unique ability to embrace the strange and seek out the unusual. Ivy was our little delicate flower. Her petals were sensitive and apprehensive to the world around her which made her all the more loving and sentimental. Eliza may have been born last, but she was far from the least. Her bright and lively perception of the world, along with a plethora of giggles, was always a fresh breath of air. Little did I know of the potential that tiny pink stocking held, and the difference it would make in all of our lives.

These girls, each so magnificently different, were my role models. There wasn't a day that went by that I didn't witness their impact and accomplishments. With this scene as my life and childhood, how could I possibly view women as anything but absolutely extraordinary? How could I stand for prejudice of any kind towards such beautiful examples in my life? Regardless of whether or not I fit into whatever definition of "feminism" my friend was referring to, at that moment, I felt grateful and proud to have grown up surrounded by little women. Because of them, I developed tenderness as well as passion, playfulness as well as grace, awareness as well as innocence. I had just as

much patience for my sister stealing my dress as I did for unnecessary arrogance and bias. Not just based on gender, but also race, physique, ethnicity, age, affiliation, beliefs, or any other defining characteristic of one's identity.

In terms of defining my own identity, being one of six daughters became a driving force for me. During getting-to-know-you games in school, I always looked forward to my turn when I would proudly say, "I have only sisters," or, "Never have I ever had a brother." I'm aware that my classmates probably weren't ever overwhelmingly impressed by my fun fact and may have grown tired of hearing it year after year. But to me, it validated my story, my interests, my personality, and even my talents. While we each have individual capabilities and skills, the Williams girls have many shared interests. These include and are not limited to: an avid love for music and the arts, an appreciation for learning and education, and a never-ending obsession over all things small, cute, and fluffy. There is no denying the role my family dynamic played in acquiring them. Often the same things we were mocked and made fun of for were the very subjects that sparked those interests. Growing up watching Barbie movies fed our appreciation for classical music. Dressing up as queens and princesses in the living room later became a reminder of our inherent worth as beautiful daughters of God. Our father didn't wrestle with us or take us to baseball games. Rather he read us stories and taught us the deep meanings and connections of the world which formed our interest in history and literature. Our mother was the source of our passion and devotion to working hard and making a difference. She was determined not to set us up for failure but to ensure we would live fulfilling lives in a harsh world with the knowledge that we were cherished daughters of God. Our struggles are what made us unique, but our value is what held our heads high. This is what made us little women.

For the longest time, I felt embarrassed or out of place when older members of the ward or strangers in the grocery store called us out on our likeness or surplus in number. I assumed they only saw a line of nesting dolls eager to follow orders. While some may have used those lenses, I realized that to most we were an exciting novelty. We were a fun sight to see sitting in the pew on Sundays with our matching brown hair and an intermixed array of stolen outfits. We were a little crazy. We were at times quite emotional. We were protective of each other when boys came into the picture. We were graceful as well as messy. We were little women, and for me, there is no greater happiness than this!

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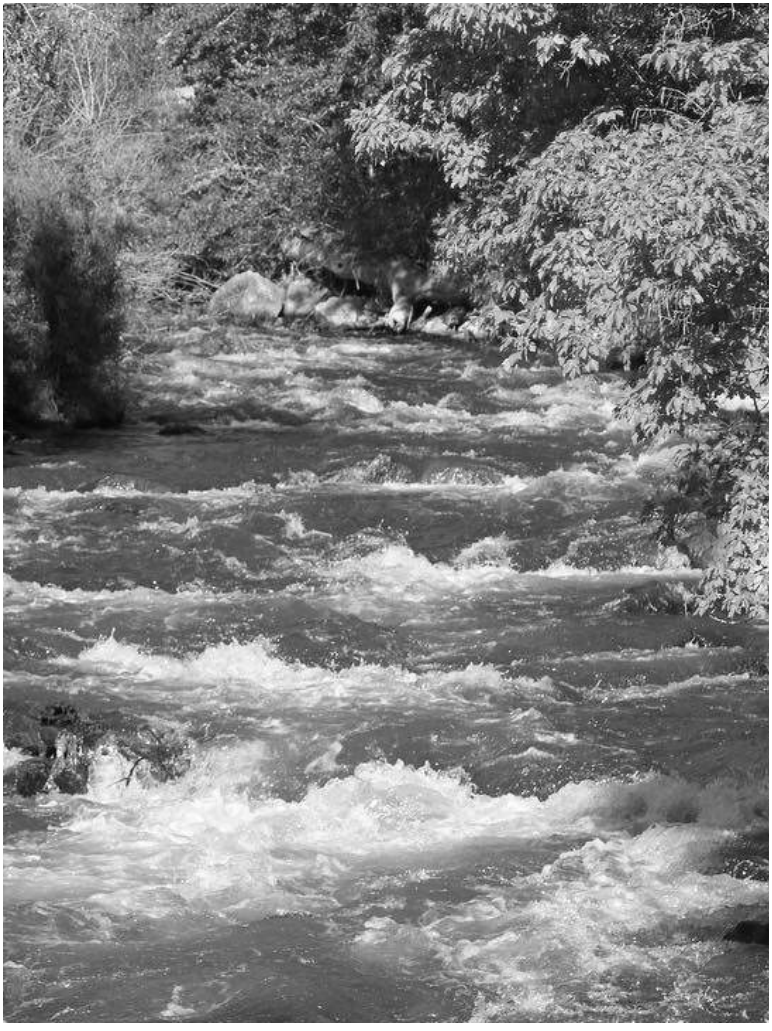

FLEUR VAN WOERKOM

This Water God Directs, and This Water God Sets Free

My feet brushed across algae and my eyelashes held droplets of lake water as I swam up to a red rock that shyly sloped above the gentle rocking waves. My cousin steered and stalled the jet ski as I scrambled up the lone pedestal, water streaming off my skin to pool at my pruned toes and continue in hair-width rivulets down to the stunted lake below. "Just think," my cousin mused in worried wonder, "you're probably the first person to stand on that rock in a very, very, very long time. Maybe ever." I raised my arms to the sky, lifted my closed eyes to the battering sun, and briefly basked in that rare moment made possible by the near-calamitous low water levels. Before that day I had never been to Lake Powell, so I had no standard by which to make comparisons, but I knew the water that seemed vast to my first-timer eyes was, in reality, sunken and shallow. It was not disastrous yet, but the future repercussions of all that water drainage surely would be. I felt the grains of the rock with the soles of my feet, roughly smooth like fine sandpaper and hot from the sun to which it was newly exposed without its usual protective layer of cool water.

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This Earth we live on is in a constant state of watery change. Since the days of creation, when God dedicated one distinct period of time to separating water between the atmosphere and the firmament, and another to separating the water of the firmament from itself by raising dry land to guide and shape the sloshing reservoirs of life, water has moved and been moved. Water has shaped and been shaped, directed and been directed, civilized and been made civil. Water has existed in too small and too large amounts, in too hot and too cold temperatures, and in such conditions has given and taken life. We trust that God knows every inch of His creations, and we believe He has perfect control of the elements, but how much freedom does He gift the wandering watery waves? They seem uncontrollable to my mortal mind, and I sometimes wonder if water, an element carefully created by God, is especially like us: granted full agency of choice to build or destruct, but at times guided into specific patterns or places by external forces.

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I took in my cousin's words as I stood on that red rock, tried to savor the feeling of truly being the first—the first girl, the first human, the first land animal—to stand on that rock without being dangerously and deeply submerged in water. Of course, I couldn't have truly been the first, or if I was I'll never know; we can never know of all the steps people before us have taken. When Noah and his people touched the cleansed land after the flood, were they the first to feel those specific specks of dust? It's impossible that humans would have already touched every surface of the Earth—an impossibility that remains most probable even today, even with countless people treading this planet's surface. Perhaps God shifted the land below the water, raising new pieces of earth and sinking others as the rain poured down

to lift the ark upon its pooling surface. How helpless those surviving people must have felt, and how full of awe.

I wonder if I would I have felt more accomplished touching that red rock if the water levels were at a safer, more secure height that summer. If I'd needed to dive, perhaps with oxygen equipment, and flap my arms against the thickness of the water in order to pretend that my body's buoyancy and my lungs' yearning for true, uncanned air wasn't pulling me away—always away—from the solid rock for which I was reaching, the solid rock upon which I now stood without any effort at all? No; that standing position did require effort. Standing, alive and alert, required energy and life. I stood on that sturdy, lifeless rock that had not moved since the hot elements cooled in the process of its creation, that rock that had been shaped by other elements like wind and water, and I felt my own elements move within my body, which God had filled with life. My heart beat and pumped watery blood without my conscious command as I looked out at the clear and colorful lake water, that earthly element which moved so freely, so easily tossed by wind and directed by shifts of the land.

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The morning after the Great Sendai Earthquake in 2011, I was jealous that emergency personnel hadn't knocked on my family's front door in the early hours. What a great story that would be, I'd thought at the time. I wish I could admonish my younger self—shouldn't a twelve-year-old know better than to romanticize disasters? Shouldn't I, knowing how much I thought I knew, have known that people were losing their lives and all that they knew and loved—even all that they hated, which they would surely have chosen to endure in exchange for their beating hearts and breathing lungs? Favorite cooking pots. Child-painted presents. Long-tended plants. And the people who tended those plants—gone. In an instant. To a massive,

trembling swell of water, a non-human force that could be blamed but not avenged.

But I was twelve, and I hadn't lived through any true disasters, so I couldn't understand. My family lived on an adequately tall hill on the California coastline, so hours after people in homes closer to the shore had been woken up and told to evacuate to higher ground, I woke to a notification that school was cancelled in anticipation of the terrible tsunami driving 5,000 miles through the Pacific, potentially spilling onto the shores and streets of the town I lived in. The news updates sounded so sure: the tsunami wreckage I'd seen only in horrifying photos on my family's desktop computer that morning was coming towards us. It had devastated Japan, and it was going to devastate my home as well. I'd never before been informed that a tsunami would hit my town, so when the newscasters said it was going to, I believed them absolutely. I'd long recognized blue street signs pointing out tsunami evacuation routes along the roads I biked on Saturday mornings, and now I would have to follow them.

Did I feel fear? I should have, if I really thought the tsunami was going to surge into the place I called home, but that is not the feeling I remember when I think of myself sitting on that wooden fence in early March, awkwardly writing the date at the top of a journal page with my left hand as I clutched a digital camera in my right hand, waiting to watch the ocean water draw back before flooding forward, waiting to document the frightful scene that I was so sure was going to happen below.

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Scriptural stories tell of God manipulating water to accomplish His purposes, and interpretations of those stories largely label the people affected by such miracles—or wrathful acts, depending on whose point of view you are considering—as either righteous or wicked. Moses safely led his faithful followers out of Egyptian slavery through the parted Red Sea,

which then collapsed as the Egyptian armies attempted to follow them, flooding their lungs with the vengeance that the Bible assigns to God's anger and protection. Jesus, our perfect Savior, walked calmly on water in the midst of a storm and turned water into wine. Prophets called upon God for water in deathly deserts, and water was provided according to faith to disprove disbelief. Such stories of God's love and wrath shown through the manipulation of water are easy to swallow when read from ancient scriptures, but when I look at current world events, it is much harder—more accurately, impossible—for me to assign righteousness or wickedness to the people affected by extreme water conditions. The people in Japan could not have deserved to die any more than the people in my town deserved to live.

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The feeling I remember having as I waited for the tsunami that never touched my town's shore was reverence. I am sure I did not understand that feeling at the time; but even now, when I look into my memory at the young girl dangling her legs off a fence as she watched for shifting waters, I know that is what I felt. When there is not space for either fear or peace, I feel that is where reverence resides. I feel reverence again now—reverence for the lives that were lost and for the people who had to continue living despite such great loss; reverence for the mysterious force of water that both kills and makes alive; reverence for the life I still get to live.

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During the winter of my last college semester, I drove mere seconds into Provo Canyon with a choreographer I'd been assigned to work with. We'd been tasked with creating a collaborative performance piece advocating for the conservation of

Utah's water—making known the sacred bodies of water that we were responsible for protecting and respecting on our small pinpoint of earthly dominion. Within this process, my writing was meant to inform her dancers' improvisation as their movement patterns informed my language.

We parked and walked along the river trail, listening to the rich sound of movement that is inherent in even the stillest bodies of water. We looked up facts about the river and learned that the Provo River had originally been called "Timpanoquint," a name that has since been transferred to the mountain that towers above and feeds this integral vein of the earth. We spent time moving in response to the river—the sounds of changing pathways, the feeling of the water contained in our own bodies, the small details observed with our blinking eyes—and then writing in response to those same things, as well in reflection of the movement our improvising bodies had generated. Taking my favorite black-blue .38 pen to paper, I toyed with lines, trying to capture the movement of water in both human bodies and larger earthly bodies of water.

we are flasks of living water in this Utah desert
upon which we breathe and drink and love
and dance and wash and sleep and play
and weep our own watery tears which fall
from our bodies to our earth
—always to our earth,
always to those larger bodies
of water from which we draw,
with which we wash our painted dishes
and clean our sweat-sweet skin.

here at this Utah Lake—
this body of steam and ice
that chills even our bones,

this fresh water, this holy water,
this watershed of snow,
this provost of our liquid lives—
here we scrape through silk and silt,
here we lick our phosphorous salt.

and here at this Provo River—
with rivulets that slosh like blood
through iron pipes which quench our veins—
here we draw our daily life,
here we kneel in reverence pure.

scientists say even the bones are watery,
those rigid sponges which hold the water
we pull endless from Utah's earth.
our hands hold heavy our H2O—
that same liquid that floods and fills our cells
as we sip new strength from stagnant pools—
held too in our tissues, in our hearts,
in our bones and brains and lungs.

and now in this theatre—
I watch these water bodies ripple,
pulled by heel and hip;
I feel the gentle slip of white noise
in their breath and steps—
these lower steps, these wondrous steps,
these pivoting heads on leaping bodies—
they carry Utah's water in their limbs
as they move their rigid sponges
and let fall their sweat and tears.

and now on this stage—
watch these water creatures wander,

watch the water in them churn.
watch them kneel upon the earth,
and watch them rise in reverence pure.

Like the red rock in Lake Powell that I'd stood on a few summers before, the riverbed was largely exposed. Stones large and small poked up through the surface of the water's skin, causing ripples and currents that would have looked vastly different had the river been fuller and stronger—although, maybe the river was stronger than it had ever been, still pushing onward in the direction it had always gone despite the drought's attempt to suspend its life. The river seemed determined to maintain its original name—which meant water running over rocks—despite the effects of changes in climate and massive increases in human population within its reach. While we moved and wrote and listened on that snow-lined river trail, my collaborative partner told me of years in her childhood when the river was full, of times when sandbags were required to contain and restrain the bountiful flow. "We had a pear tree that was always bare," she recounted, "but that year the river flowed the highest, that was the one year our pear tree produced pears."

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I wondered, would our creative work, intended to advocate for the conservation of this God-created element that did not have a voice beyond its calming murmurs of movement, raise any awareness at all? Would pear trees bear fruit in future years? Would it make a difference in people's attitudes towards the bodies of water in our stewardship? Would God be able to use our work as an external force to guide people into new patterns of reverence? And if not, if conservation efforts fail and Utah becomes even more of a desert than it ever has been before, would God step in to save?

MEGAN MCOMBER WIGHT

Breath, Babies, and the Immortal Jellyfish

In the echoey blue, low light of my local aquarium, I watched jellyfish pulse through tanks of water that looked like air. Their iridescent tops palpitated, floating them back and forth to hover. Their tentacle legs entangled with each other, connecting in one communal heap. Legs and hearts woven together.

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Through the wavering lines of black and white static, I first knew my daughter on a screen. Before the ultrasound image pulled to focus, all we saw was a kaleidoscope of fractals dividing, expanding, and surging. The technician searched through a thick white ring that surrounded a cavern of black. The darkness appeared hollow but was filled with so much. Finally at the very center of it all sat a tiny bud, the size of a bean. We heard her heart beat, the roar and crash of blood, the promise that she was really there, vined inside me.

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Under a lapis light I scanned a 6-foot poster about *Turritopsis dohrnii*: the immortal jellyfish. I learned this creature is 4.5

millimeters across, about the size of a pencil top eraser, the pupil of an eye, or just smaller than a six-week-old fetus. The immortal jellyfish floats along, hitchhiking across the sea. At the center of its clear, bell-shaped body lies a red spiral. It looks like a heart or perhaps a flower. Filament-thin tentacles extend from the body in delicate wisps that now, looking back, remind me of my daughter's feather fine hair when she jumps on the trampoline. Those tentacles and her hair reach toward the sky, each strand illuminated in the light.

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In the dimly lit ultrasound room, my belly glowed under the light of the flatscreen TV positioned high up on the wall. During the hour-long twenty-week anatomy scan, I watched my baby wriggle. Spinning spine over belly, over and over. The technician had to measure our baby's head circumference eight different times because she wouldn't stay still. The doctors tried to capture the perfect profile shot, but she kept kicking, and nuzzling her face down into the placenta. Over the course of the hour, they counted her toes and hands, checked the lobes of her brain, her belly, each vertebra of her spine, and her perfect papery lungs. I saw parts of her on that monochromatic flickering screen that I hope I will never see again. And then they checked her pulsing heart. Hovered over each ventricle, I could watch her blood gush with every palpitating beat. She took my breath away.

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As the name suggests, *Turritopsis dohrnii* can live forever. The poster contained a clean, colorful diagram to help illustrate an almost incomprehensible concept: forever. From what I gleaned from the poster, in moments of extreme stress, suffering, or starvation, the immortal jellyfish can flee to an earlier stage.

It sucks the threads of tentacles back into its body, sacrificing its ability to swim. Then its tiny top sinks to the seafloor. Reverting to the polyp stage, the jellyfish begins its life cycle again.

This would be like a butterfly fleeing back into its cocoon only to become a caterpillar. I imagine maybe even a baby crawling back inside its mother's womb: lungs collapsing, lanugo sprouting, eyes sealing shut, enveloped in white noise and muffled voices, hovering in water that a baby will breathe like air.

The immortal jellyfish's flight to *prior*, to *previous*, to *before* can happen again and again and again. Scientists don't know how many times this recycling can take place. They don't know the longest amount of time one of these jellyfish has lived or how many times it has resurrected.

This made me think of my daughter sitting in the stroller next to the poster; she left my watery cocoon just six months before this aquarium trip. It made me think about my own pre-body curled inside my mother.

• • •

When Gwen was born, someone asked me, "Do you recognize any of her movements from when she was inside of you?" And I did. I recognized the way her feet kick, kick, kicked, constantly, always. When she was born, the doctors kept telling us how strong her legs were. I remembered feeling those heels slipping across my center, knocking the air out of my lungs in punctuated gasps. There was something about her, even when she was inside of me, that was so uniquely her. I believe in the holy mixture of body, blood, and spirit. I believe that something temporal is beautifully woven with a piece that is eternal.

I believed that, but never had I felt it so clearly as when I recognized her spinning, kicking, and the way she liked to sleep with her head shoved right in the corner of her bassinet. I recognized her from the way she was when my body was still her home. It was as if the infinite had been compressed to live

inside me. She was before and she will be after. But, for a moment, I held someone's immortality.

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Back in the aquarium, I was transfixed by the jellyfish. While the rest of the group moved far along—I stood still. I felt the urge to pull the poster off the wall, fold it up, and take it home to memorize. Instead, I took a picture and wondered how much suffering it takes to push an immortal jellyfish to an earlier form. I wondered about the amount of pain it would take for me to revert.

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When I had my daughter, something broke in me. Something that cannot be summed up in stitches or third-degree tears recorded on my medical chart. It wasn't the spreading of my hips, or forever stretch marks on my skin. It was something deeper than that. Something that now flows through my veins and is trapped in my mind. Now I have lightning fears in my chest that a semi is going to hop the sidewalk and hit us while we are on our afternoon walk. Simultaneously, I wonder when I will stop feeling so numb. When going back to bed will no longer feel like the best answer. I wonder if I will ever stop counting my daughter's swallows when she nurses. If I will stop crying in the Walmart parking lot after abandoning my cart in the shampoo aisle because it was all just too much. I wonder which of these days would be enough to cause me to revert, to slip back into the time before.

I pray for the guilt to go away that roils in my chest. That terrible feeling that I have ruined people's lives and they would be better off without me. These moments are enough to make me willing to force myself into starvation and suffering if it meant forgetting. If it meant being able to go back to before. I

long to shed the tentacles of my pain and revert to a preaching polyp.

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I don't remember the sounds of Gwen's first breath, only what came after—her aching cry. I imagine her breathing was wet, labored, sticky. Forcing air in for the first time, sucking in a foreign world. I wonder what those first breaths felt like, could it have been painful? Scary? She cried until the nurse laid her on me, chest to chest. Her eyes opened wide, seeing the world for the very first time; she was so still.

Looking down at my stomach, watching it slowly deflate of water and blood, I felt an ache that she would never be inside me again. I would never feel her turning and kicking. She would never be so safe and warm and unaware. This side of immortality she just entered is rugged and raw. I held her tight to my chest, skin to skin, and whispered to her all the beautiful things she was going to see because she opened her eyes. Because she took that first breath.

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The type of immortality *Turritopsis dohrnii* experiences sounds tempting to me. I know exactly what to expect of yesterday. I know exactly what my pre-baby-Gwen mind felt like. I would love to be her again. It is tomorrow that terrifies me. The unknown. That despite my most obsessive planning and hundreds of to-do lists, I cannot control what comes next.

But going back is not the kind of immortality I am participating in. Part of forever includes the past, but not one I can return to. Eternity for me now is made up of future. But it feels impossible to understand how I will transcend past this aching.

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Every day . . . or at least almost every day, I take two little pills. They are small and oval. I think they are light green, but I would have to check the bottle to be sure. And I think I took them today, but I can't remember if that was last night or this morning. Those little pills are supposed to make me stop crying so much, stop always feeling like I have done something horribly wrong, stop asking my husband for the fortieth time if he is okay with me, stop my heart from pounding when my baby won't nap or nurse.

Every time I gulp down these pills, it feels like an act of faith. When I pray, I don't hear voices or see anything, but I hope someone is listening. When I repent, there is no physical change or sign that I am clean, but I hope someone is forgiving me. When I take that pill, I don't see it unfolding my brain and fixing connections, but I hope something is healing.

Opening that bottle feels like a prayer and slipping those pills down with water—a baptism. I am hoping that if I can't revert, then perhaps I could be born again. That after all this suffering I hope I can be reborn to something new.

I do not understand a God who lets a daughter suffer so much after bearing a child. I do not understand why He answers some prayers so quickly and why He lets us sit in the wilderness, bleed in our own Gethsemanes, or burn in the fire for so long. But what I have come to understand is there is an unexpected reverence that comes as a result of pain. Time may not be able to move backward, but it does seem to freeze in moments of extreme suffering. And in that stretching of time I have seen so many beautiful things: the feel of my baby's hand rubbing my side while she nurses, the way droplets of water rest on my shoulders after a shower, the way the body of a jellyfish holds light, the curve of my tongue as I inhale to pray.

• • •

My daughter is eighteen months old now, and sometimes I find myself still thinking about that past me standing in the aquarium. I know the way her postpartum stitches still ached and how she wondered how she was going to make it to the next day, let alone forever. I know how she would have given anything to tuck that baby back inside her, or perhaps even tuck herself back inside her own mother. That in her mind was every particle of suffering that should have granted her the miracle of reverting. But I know now that no matter how hard she prays, she cannot and will not go back. I wish I could show her the next few moments of her eternity. That it may not get much better in her head, but to give her the vision of all the unexpected reverence that will make it possible to keep living, the reverence that feels like for one moment, eternity is compressed into an instant. The same as when I first saw Gwen inside of me. The first flurry of her movement in my gut. The eternal reverence of my daughter's beating heart that if I look close enough, I can see in her veins. The sounds of deep grateful gulps as she nurses after a long nap. The vision of her filament-thin hair fluttering through the air with every bounce of her perfect body.

Every morning I open my eyes and take in a breath, and another, and another. Sometimes I think about the me that might still be breathing twenty years from now. Every action I take now seems a witness to me that I believe I will make it to the next moment. I take medication, go to therapy, walk outside, and keep taking breaths because I believe that the next future piece of immortality is coming. I wonder about the me and my daughter who exist so far in the future and I wonder what images they can't wait for me to see. What unexpected reverence I will feel throughout this pain, what moments of compressed eternity I will hold. And for that, I decide to keep breathing.

ISAAC JAMES RICHARDS

The Vehicle of the Metaphor

This essay is about time and cars. I need you to know that up front, because while those two concepts are connected on a physical level, I will strive to connect them on a spiritual level. Through physical and spiritual duality, eventually this essay will no longer be about *time* and *cars* but instead about *eternity* and *bodies*. It is up to you when that shift takes place. If you can keep those four relationships in mind (time/cars, eternity/bodies) then we will stay on the right track and not crash. I'll try not to backseat drive while you read. Long before Google Maps existed, Joseph Smith taught: "If we start right, it is easy to go right all the time; but if we start wrong we may go wrong, and it will be a hard matter to get right." I've exposed all my metaphors up front because I'm trying to start right. After all, life isn't a highway: it's the car. That's what is driving this essay.

As a child, I loved road trips. Road trips meant curling up in the backseat with an iPod—hours of nostalgia and music—watching the Wasatch Mountains go by. My dad always drove, and I felt safe knowing that his eyes were on the road even when mine weren't. I could read books, watch movies, play video games, or simply go to sleep when it was late and dark.

Never mind that our bodies were hurtling eighty miles an hour across the rock of earth in a fragile metal shell. And often, after a long nighttime drive home, the shift from highway cruising to stoplights and stop signs would rouse me to a subtle consciousness. But I'd keep my eyes tightly shut so my father would gently lift me from the car seat and carry me into bed. Of course, there was the occasional scare. Dad would hit the rumble strip. Mom would gasp. Our bodies would be flung forward against our seatbelts.

> My heart bleeds for the innocent victims who ride along safely and are run into by . . . speed demons. (Richards)

Accident #1: 2007 Dodge Caravan, Gray

We didn't have one: a stop sign. The other driver, in a UPS truck, missed theirs. I don't remember seeing anything, just hearing my mom scream—just my forehead to the glass like a whipcrack. The truck tore off our entire back bumper, ripping past us. I wonder what would have happened if my mom had hit the brakes instead of the gas.

> No, life is not a self-driving car. (Uchtdorf)

Accident #2: 2003 Honda Accord, Teal

The high school parking lot had many exits, but they all came to one intersection down the road, just as spokes of a wheel converge at the hub. I got a ride to and from school with two seniors from my ward when I was a sophomore. After school, the cars would impatiently inch forward one by one. It was customary to let your friends pull in ahead of you as a gesture of solidarity. I always sat in the back.

Chris was driving (or trying to). Drew was in the passenger seat, punching Chris in the arm repeatedly, shouting: "Slug bug,

what color? What color? What color?" Chris searched frantically to find the hue that would save his shoulder—crunch. We rear-ended the car in front of us.

I could see the shame. Drew's and Chris's. Chris's shame had a tinge of anger too. He was both victim and perpetrator. His frustration was his mother's headache and his father's insurance bill. Drew got off "scotch" free as we teens incorrectly phonetized it. Of course, the real phrase is "scot-free," referring to a medieval tax that, if evaded successfully, meant you were tax free. I'm wondering if a more contemporary idiom might be "ticket free," referring to speeding, driving without a seatbelt, texting and driving, and a host of other traffic related violations (running red lights, illegal parking, illegal U-turns, not using turn signals, etc.). Today, the road is the easiest place to break the law and get away scot-free.

Accident #3: 2006 Toyota Corolla, Green

During my senior year, I was carpooling to school with two other friends in a snowstorm. We were late, of course. From the backseat, I watched as we slid around a bend, skipped on ice, and bumped into a snowbank.

> The van began sliding on the surface of the road. (Wixom)

I have mixed feelings about lateness. I'm told that lateness is impolite, that it suggests your time is more important than everyone else's, and that it marks you as forgetful and unorganized. At the same time, my theology asserts that there is no such thing as time. An eternal perspective would seem to say that punctuality is not a virtue because time doesn't exist; "all is as one day with God, and time only is measured unto men" (Alma 40.8). Yet, for all the scriptures about a thousand years as a single day (see Psalm 90.4), there are plenty more that

urge haste and hurrying. I suppose that the reality of eternity is no excuse for disobedience to the construct of time here on earth, but I admit that I tend to be late. Car accidents and speeding are certainly symptoms of this false sense of rush. When I think theologically, I'm inclined to be deliberately late in protest, to be incredibly patient, and to await all things (including rush hour traffic) in the "due time of the Lord" (1 Ne. 10.3). Mostly, I just look forward to the day when "there should be time no longer" (Rev. 10.6).

Accident #4: 2015 Peterbilt Potato Truck, White and Red

In southeast Idaho, there is a two-week break in October called spud harvest. School's out, and many high school students work in the fields. Some kids drive tractors and trucks on the farms well before they have their licenses. There were always loads of moving equipment and machinery. Arms got stuck in conveyer belts and broken. People lost fingers.

It was the last day of the season and only a few more truckloads of potatoes remained in the soft-churned dirt. Fortuitously, the season had been uneventful for the farmer—I'll call him Hank. The weather had been nonstop mellow. I was one of the last trucks pulling in to unload when Hank stopped me. From my sideview mirror I saw him say something to the Anderson boy who nodded and then jumped into my cab.

"Where are we going?" I asked.

"I'll show you," was his reply.

The stubborn punk was apparently relishing the fact that he knew something I didn't. He directed me to a crammed part of the farmyard between three old storage silos that were now filled with clutter, scraps, and rusted equipment. The Anderson boy wanted me to pull into one of them, and he refused to respond to my questions.

I knew the truck wouldn't fit inside the cellar. I warned him. Angrily, I followed his instructions, pulling front-first through

the side door. He then demanded that I perform a three- (read: thirty-) point turn. After painstakingly easing the truck back and forth, I realized the objective: we were trying to get the rear end of the truck, full of uncovered potatoes, out of the sun. By the time I read the mind of the tight-mouthed Anderson boy, it was too late—a different kind of late. I would've just backed halfway into the cellar to cover up the potatoes in the shade if I had known the goal. I would've left the cab of the truck poking out. Now I was stuck, and my chances of getting out were about as wide as a potato chip. Eyes fixed on the Anderson boy in my sideview mirrors, I followed his beckoning hands right into—bang—a bent chute and a damaged doorframe.

I had never seen Hank so red in the face, but it wasn't the first time I'd heard the former bishop swear.

Earlier that same season, my friend Jason was showing off to the first girl we'd seen in a week on the farm. He let her ride in the cab and apparently hit a mud puddle at breakneck speed, splattering muck clear over the top of the windshield, fifteen feet in the air.

"How fast was he going?" Hank asked incredulously. He pretended to be angry, but I saw him take a picture of the mud-splattered truck when Jason wasn't looking. He thought it was cool.

The next Sunday, Jason was the youth speaker in church. He spoke of mud and stain, sin and pain, repentance, baptism, and the earth right after rain. He'd learned a good lesson from the farmer's mercy. He'd been forgiven.

> Guilt is like a battery in a gasoline-powered car. It can light up the car, start the engine, and power the headlights, but it will not provide the fuel for the long journey ahead. (Andersen)

"Utahns ranked among the worst drivers in the Nation," the headline says (Chow). According to the 2022 study, based on analysis of six million car insurance quotes in America's seventy largest cities, Utah ranks as the sixth worst state to drive in, and Salt Lake as the eighth worst city (Chow), with 62,272 crashes, 17,589 injuries, 298 fatalities. That's in Utah in a single year—the most recent one (Utah Department of Public Safety). We call them fatalities to make certain they are perceived as *accidents*.

> Imagine you are involved in a very serious car accident. (Wakolo)

The word "vehicle" has a few definitions, but my favorite is: "a thing used to express, embody, or fulfill something" (Oxford Languages), as in *essays are vehicles of emotion*. It comes from the Latin *vehere* or "to carry." The word "vehicle" is also one of the two key terms in the metaphor theory developed by I. A. Richards, the *tenor* referring to what is meant and the *vehicle* being "the image that carries the weight of the comparison" (Britannica). So if *vehicle* is my metaphor for the mortal body, then the vehicle of my metaphor is a vehicle, and the vehicle is carrying the vehicle—the weight of the comparison—or our own bodies across the asphalt.

Body as vehicle is not a new metaphor (or, vehicle). As just mentioned, a definition of the word *vehicle* is "to embody." King Benjamin taught that Jesus would "dwell in a tabernacle of clay" (Mosiah 3.5). The word tabernacle means "a fixed or movable habitation" from the Latin *taberna*, meaning "hut or tavern." Jesus himself says: "I was in the world and made flesh my tabernacle" (D&C 93.4). The thing in which we dwell is as temporary as travel. This *I* that I am, this heart and mind that can imagine itself stepping out of my skin, as a translucent ghost, looking back at the body sitting at the desk, this self does

not belong in its temporary habitation. I am not my tabernacle. But the spirit and body when separated "cannot receive a fulness of joy" (D&C 93.34), just as both tenor and vehicle are required for a metaphor. Half a metaphor is no metaphor at all. So eventually, I will be one with the vehicle of my body. For now, it carries me. My mortal body is only a vehicle, carrying something more, meaning something more than what it is, like how the image of a human body is only a vehicle in a metaphor whose tenor no one can write.

> But the car's purpose is not to stand out as an attractive machine; it is to move the *people* in the car. (Causse)

Accident #5: 1998 Subaru Hatchback, White

It was the summer after my junior year of high school. The Subaru was no longer white, but rather a cream tinged with yellow and spots of orange rust. The Subaru was formerly used to transport gas cans for the boat from the cabin to the beach on a three-mile stretch of gravel. The cans leaked frequently, and the car reeked of gasoline. When my grandparents eventually wanted to get rid of it, they gave it to my dad, who tried for weeks to eliminate the acrid smell. After significant online research, he finally found the answer from a stranger on Quora: "If it smells like gas, there is still gas somewhere." Dad ripped up the carpet and found it, a layer of gasoline congealed with the adhesive beneath the carpet, almost ready to be fracked again. Once it had all been painstakingly removed, the stench of gasoline was gone.

Many surgeries were performed on that Subaru. Orange foam burst from gashes in the blue faux leather seats. Due to ignition problems, the key chamber was replaced with a starter button.

> [We] are not whistling in the dark, trying to shore up a building that will ultimately collapse, or to fix a car which is actually bound for the scrap-heap. (Christofferson)

The car was so old that it still had a cigarette lighter that would heat up, a red-hot metal coil. As a child, I remember it being a symbol of some bygone time, a time when smoking was so common that you could light one up right from the driver's seat of your car. I could almost see myself tapping off the ashes out the window and into the breeze.

The car didn't have automatic windows—you had to turn a crank to roll them down. There was no air conditioning. It was a stick shift with four gears. The highest it went was about fifty-five miles an hour downhill. It was pedal-to-the-metal, literally, climbing Ashton Hill. Perhaps I'm one of few who have really experienced that sensation, the full weight of your foot on the floor, your leg muscles starting to ache and quake and quiver, as the vehicle putts up the hill like a slowly rolling white golf ball on a steep green.

Here's the scene of the accident: I was living in West Yellowstone, Montana, working at Arrowleaf Ice Cream Parlor in the evenings. I slept at my grandparents' cabin. During the day I rode four-wheelers, went water-skiing on the lake, and played sand volleyball. On the weekends I drove back to Rexburg for church and a weekly temple trip. This time around it was a late-night movie, early morning temple trip, big lunch, and late afternoon drive—a recipe for a nap.

I had just rounded the top of Ashton Hill to a strip of highway that stretched as far as I could see between the leveled lodgepole pines. I remember being sleepy. I remember yawning. I had cranked the windows down to let the wind buffet the interior of the car to make up for the lack of air conditioning. It was like deafening white noise. I was sweaty and tired. My Subway sandwich settled into my stomach.

I don't remember closing my eyes, but I remember opening them. I woke up when the right wheel dropped off the shoulder, my eyes snapping open just in time to watch the hood of the car level a reflector with a smack. My eyes locked like a camera lens, blurred around the edges, and stared straight forward through the windshield as I went careening and crashing in jarring jolts over bushes and tree stumps through the narrow strip of meadow along the highway.

I frantically attempted to stop. (Zwick)

What I remember most are the tennis balls. The whole basket of them came loose in the back. Two dozen green furry orbs were suspended in the air—floating—then bouncing, jumping—on the dash, off the glass, throughout the car, on me. The Subaru slowly ground to a halt, the dust settling, tennis balls nestled in every nook and cranny of the console. I sat in silence. I turned the car off. I creaked opened the door and stepped out, surprised by how close the ground was to my knees.

The trip across the forest floor had ripped up the entire underside of the car—all four tires deflated, both axles broken, the underside of the car resting flat on the ground, leaving not even an inch of space between vehicle and grass. I looked around. A few cars had pulled over. A cop arrived. I called my dad.

Looking back, I remember being surprised that he wasn't mad. Not only was he not mad, but he seemed genuinely happy—just grateful that I was alive. He took pictures of the car and gave me a hug and told me it was okay while I apologized multiple times, meaning it.

I was going to be late for work, so we got right into his car and continued down the highway. I slept crumpled in the passenger's seat the entire way from the wreckage to West Yellowstone.

The cop said it looked like I didn't even hit the brakes, as if the friction of the car on the terrain was the only thing that stopped me. He couldn't believe I didn't roll. My dad said that

if I had veered off earlier or later, in a location where the shoulder was a steep drop-off rather than a gradual decline, the car would've plummeted headfirst and folded into the mountain. The airbags didn't go off . . . it didn't have any.

The word "miracle" comes to mind. I still reflect on that accident. It was one of those moments that makes death feel near, makes the afterlife feel real, and makes life feel precious.

> Life is too precious. It is the greatest gift that the Lord has given to us. We cannot waste it, and if I, by bringing this to your attention, can save one carload of teenagers from careening into a station . . . as they did the other night, I shall be grateful, and therefore I take the liberty of bringing this to the attention of my brethren of the Priesthood to see if we cannot develop a respect for the law which will enable us to avoid many of these tragic accidents. (Richards)

I was twenty-one years old when I read those words, written by my great-great-grandfather. It was the summer after my mission, the month of May, and I'd already been pulled over twice—driving that same highway back and forth to work in West Yellowstone. Every weekend I passed the place where I'd fallen asleep four years earlier. When I read great-great-grandpa's General Conference talk, his words from sixty-three years before sounded like they were written for me. I started to slow down. I started to come to a full stop.

Accident #6: Public Bus (APSRTC) in Visakhapatnam, India, Orange and Red

Traffic laws in India are optional. My companion and I were on a bus, standing up, holding onto plastic loops dangling from the ceiling. We were going about fifty miles an hour around a

bend, hugging the black and yellow painted median, when the driver slammed on the brakes. Our bodies were flung completely forward, moving faster inside the bus than the bus itself was moving. The reaction was delayed: our toes dangling far behind us, our hands seizing around the straps, our heads swinging down to face the aisle floor, as though suspended horizontally in the air. We could feel the bus decelerating and slowly straightened up, only to be rammed from behind, this time flung from our handholds, barreling backwards into the bodies behind us as the bus lurched forward from the impact.

Everyone quickly but rather calmly exited the bus, then hopped on the next one to continue down the road.

Missionaries are no strangers to car metaphors. We frequently told less-active members that church was not a car show, it was a mechanic's shop, and that we all need to go in for tune-ups. Perhaps, whether we know it or not, cars are functioning at a subconscious level as a metaphor for our mortal bodies, our journey through life. The plan of salvation doctrine and the eternal perspective worldview mean that we are constantly *en route*, and that can be exhausting. So much so that a recent prophetic invitation was to come and find rest—an interesting October message to follow up the April exhortation about gaining spiritual momentum.

A glance at the General Conference archives reveals the ubiquity of road metaphors and car accident narratives in Latter-day Saint sermons.

> After surviving cancer, a faithful brother is hit by a car. (Gong)

> Jonathan had been fatally injured when the car in which he was riding was struck by a passing train. (Renlund)

Car accidents afford a variety of archetypes: the victim, the perpetrator, the affected family members. Car accidents have become a theological metonymy for justice, mercy, the unfairness of mortal life, circumstances beyond our control, adversity in general, and even divine interventions that call a mortal traveler home in an instant.

> These powerful truths were life-changing for my friend Jen, who as a teenager caused a serious car accident. (Taylor)

The versatility of these vehicular metaphors is astounding. Other references draw more indirect or abstract parallels.

> Even though the car had great potential, without keys, it could not perform its intended function. (Stevenson)

Other references seem to be intentionally dramatic and gruesome.

> A 20-year-old drunk driver, speeding at more than 85 miles (135 km) per hour . . . crashed violently into the car driven by my youngest brother, Tommy, instantly killing him and his wife, Joan. They were returning home to a young daughter after a Christmas party. (Echohawk)

> Cooper had been hit by a car. . . . [He] was lying on the grass, struggling to breathe. (Alonso)

What about our theology isn't transforming into applied Christianity? Latter-day Saints believe there is "no need to

break the laws of the land" (D&C 58.21). Drive safely. It should be the eleventh commandment. But not really—perhaps it's because we aren't all that worried about crashing: we all know what will happen to us and our bodies once we die. Sure, driving slowly could be an embodiment of faith in eternity, but so too could be an abnormal tolerance for death of any kind, road-related or not. I'm expressing confusion, not condemnation. Stephen L Richards gave two conference addresses in the 1950s that explicitly warned about the dangers of reckless driving. And I don't even have space to include my quotes from Thomas S. Monson (October, 2012), Anthony D. Perkins (October, 2012), Koichi Ayoagi (October, 2015), Bonnie H. Cordon (October, 2017), Sharon Eubank (October, 2017), Henry B. Eyring (April, 2017), Rebecca L. Craven (April, 2019) and many others, just from the last two decades alone.

Even if one safely travels the roads of life, cars get old. We depreciate. Things stop working. We can't go quite as fast. We blow a gasket. We get the oil changed and an IV. Rotate the tires and crutches. Top off the fluids and prescriptions. Refuel. Count steps and reset the odometer. Turn on the windshield wipers. Clean our glasses, smeared with bugs and tears.

Not all driving is accident. Not all of life is rush. One of the most pleasurable drives I ever took was on the Mesa Falls Scenic Byway with my younger brother. I was recently married. He was working in West Yellowstone now instead of me. He wanted to take the quick route from Idaho to Montana, up Ashton Hill. I told him we were in no hurry, and that we should enjoy the drive. We saw a skunk and stopped at the waterfall. The sun was glinting off the backs of cows. We talked about his upcoming mission. My brother asked me what the biggest regret of my life was so far. I told him it was crashing the Subaru, since all my younger brothers could've driven it. He shook his head and said: "That's *my* greatest regret of your life too." We laughed.

The drive took two hours longer than usual, but I remember that trip more than all the other times I sped between Rexburg and West Yellowstone.

Look down the road. (Meredith III)

I did fall asleep one other time while driving. I was alone. It was late afternoon. I was southbound: the sun falling to my right, the mountains rising to my left. This time, I don't remember being tired. I don't remember yawning, or closing my eyes, or slapping my cheeks to try and stay awake. I didn't feel the need to crank music or call someone. I only remember opening my eyes to the sudden realization that I was hundreds of yards down the road from where I was before. The landscape had skipped a beat. The road was empty. The car had stayed its course, even with the wheel in my limp, unconscious hands. It was as though I had jumped forward in time—an eternal blip. I wonder if that is how it will feel, when all this mortality is said and done, when we finally open our eyes and realize that we had fallen asleep during the tiniest sliver of our journey, and that the stretch of road we thought we had known was merely a car's length of an inter-estate highway.

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SARAH SAFSTEN

On Feet Keeping

I've been wondering about feet keeping ever since I first sang the hymn "Lead, Kindly Light" in church, and in the twenty years since. The part I'm wondering about goes like this:

> Lead, kindly light, amid th'encircling gloom;
> Lead thou me on!
> The night is dark, and I am far from home;
> Lead thou me on!
> Keep thou my feet; I do not ask to see
> The distant scene—one step enough for me.

What exactly does it mean to keep a person's feet? If animal keeping refers to the care and maintenance of animals, then does *feet keeping* refer to the care and maintenance of feet? And this question prompts another: if I were asked to keep someone's feet, where would I keep them? In memory? In a box of keepsakes? In the refrigerator, for up to one week? In a photo album? Next to me? And, how would I keep them? Gently? Grudgingly? Good-humoredly?

After some initial research, I learned that "Lead Kindly Light," originally published under the title "The Pillar of the Cloud" in 1833, was written by a thirty-three-year-old English

clergyman named John Henry Newman. He wrote these lines while on a boat, sailing from Marseille, France, to his native England (Newman, *Apologia*). During the journey, he became dangerously ill with fever. Perhaps the physical sickness he felt seemed symbolic of some inner spiritual fever too, because his poem reads as a kind of prayer—a plea not for physical healing, but for divine help and spiritual guidance. At the time, Newman was enthusiastically involved in the Oxford movement, a series of endeavors that sought a renewal of Roman Catholic thought and practice within the Church of England (Chadwick). Perhaps one of his motivations for writing this poem was to express some uncertainty about the Church of England, since he later converted to the Roman Catholic Church in 1845. In any case, it's likely that Newman borrowed the phrase "keep thou my feet" from the bible, specifically 1 Samuel 2.9: "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness; for by strength shall no man prevail."

But still, I wonder about feet keeping. In one sense, "keep" means to continue doing something, as in *keep trying*. In another sense, "keep" means to maintain a particular state of mind or body, as in *keep calm, keep quiet*, and *keep safe*. And in another sense, "keep" means to pay attention to, observe, or abide by something, as in *keep a promise*. "Keep" also means to own or hold onto, as in *keep the change*. And, "keep" means to abide with someone, as in *keep me company*. Was Newman asking God to own and protect, to pay attention and abide with his feet? To help his feet maintain and continue their daily tasks? I think so.

I also suspect he was using the rhetorical figure *synecdoche*, from the Greek meaning to "understand one thing with another" or to substitute a part for a whole ("Synecdoche"). Why would Newman use feet as the part to represent the whole? One reason could be that a person's feet are their center of balance—their source of support under the weight of earth's gravity. In fact, there are many idioms in the English language that, using

synecdoche, conflate the feet with the body: *Put your best foot forward. Get your foot in the door. Stand on your own two feet. Keep your feet.* So, when Newman asked God to lead his feet, he asked for guidance for his whole body.

I guess I have feet on the brain.

• • •

Feet keeping is a high priority for ballroom dancers, who spend long hours honing their abilities to lead and follow each other's feet. For a long time in the ballroom dance world, the word "lady" was essentially synonymous with the word "follower," and the word "gentleman" was synonymous with the word "leader." I have resented this fact for a long time. I have fought, often, with my partners over leading and following. In fact, there's a stereotype—women joke self-deprecatingly about their bad habit of "back-leading"—where the follower resists the leader's signals for the movements to come, and instead persist (sometimes even forcibly) in their own way of dancing. Men sometimes joke that they wouldn't be able to dance their routine but for the help of their woman's back-leading. But usually, at the end of all these jokes, there's the implication that the male is the leader (for better or for worse), and it's the female's job to follow him.

In recent years, ballroom dancers have largely stopped defining their role in the partnership by gender, and instead designate one partner as "leader" and the other as "follower." I am glad for this shift in nomenclature, but even so, I am still the designated follower in my dancing partnership, a role in which I have trained for the past eight years. In truth, I can't perform my choreography to its full potential without my partner, the designated leader. If my partner gives the signal for me to move in a certain direction, it is my responsibility to move there. Even if I would interpret the music differently, or even if I would rather move somewhere else.

Despite my feelings of annoyance, I still dance the traditional way (I don't cause scenes on the dance floor or throw temper tantrums just because I wish I could lead). I don't feel anger or resentment when my partners lead me. They're not domineering. They don't force me to move in dangerous or uncomfortable places. They've been responsive, friendly, and kind. I know there isn't any special honor or prestige in being the leader, but I sometimes want to lead because I feel that I know better than my partner. I want to lead because I don't feel like listening to or following directions. I want to lead because it's a good feeling to be in charge, to be The Boss.

• • •

When Newton wrote, "one step enough for me," did he really mean it? Or was that statement an aspiration, a goal of meekness and humility he was trying to achieve through manifesting it in writing? We can guess that Newman did wrestle with pride for several years. His second verse reflects this:

> I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou
> Shouldst lead me on;
> I loved to choose and see my path; but now
> Lead thou me on!
> I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,
> Pride ruled my will.
> Remember not past years.

Although he was devoutly religious as a young man, he still seemed to struggle to reconcile his own desires with what God seemed to be leading him to do. Perhaps he felt as if God was directing him toward the Roman Catholic Church, even while he was a stalwart member of the Church of England. Maybe Newman hesitated when he contemplated leaving a church he had been attending his entire life. Could this be what he meant by the line, "Pride ruled my will"?

• • •

When I was a beginning dancer, my coach taught me how to follow and taught my partner how to lead. He told us to imagine that our bodies were cars and that our hands were the gas pedals. When we held hands, we could accelerate toward each other at equal rates by pushing against each other. My coach used this car metaphor to help us quantify the level of muscle tone between our bodies and communicate the direction of our movement using non-verbal signals. To practice, my coach asked me to close my eyes and mirror my partner's movements based on his lead. I followed pretty well at first. When I felt pressure on the inside of my right hand, I moved my right hip toward my partner. When the pressure increased, I followed by continuing to move my hip to the right. Next, my partner shifted his weight and stepped toward me. Even with my eyes closed, I could sense this change, and so I followed him by stepping back. I continued backward until suddenly the pressure in my hands changed. He reversed direction suddenly, but I was too slow. I stepped back when I should have stepped forward. My partner and coach laughed a "gotcha" laugh.

• • •

In 1848, thirteen years after that fateful boat ride back to England, and after many years of spiritual struggle, Newman officially converted to Catholicism. He seemed to have figured out how to follow God's lead. Of being a follower, he wrote:

> Let us put ourselves into His hands, and not be startled though He leads us by a strange way, a *mirabilis via*, as the Church speaks. Let us be sure He will lead us right, that He will bring us to that which is, not indeed what we think best, nor what is best for another, but what is best for us. (Neville)

Mirabilis via. Latin for "wonderful way." It's a beautiful sentiment, to be sure. I think all of us hope that God will bring us to what is best for us.

But I wonder how to put myself into God's hands in a practical sense. Newton described it as a kind of letting go of anxiety, or a choice to trust that whatever happens as evidence of God's plan for you being fulfilled: "God leads us by strange ways; we know He wills our happiness, but we neither know what our happiness is, nor the way. We are blind; left to ourselves we should take the wrong way; we must leave it to Him" (Neville). I doubt Newton's spiritual journey was easy, but in the end, it seemed he felt a sense of peace and contentment in following God's plan for him.

In contrast, I often feel that I can lead myself better than the leader can. As a follower of God, my resistance is sometimes due to pride. But I also think I'm resistant because of doubt or fear. In other words, I don't know what I'm being led to do, and I'm afraid of stepping in the wrong direction. Let me be clear: I know generally what to do in order to be "a good person": love other people. Treat them as I would have them treat me. Which means not stonewalling them, snapping at them for being stupid, or punching them on the nose. But discerning more complicated things, like how to reconcile my faith and my doubt, is more difficult.

• • •

In social settings, most ballroom dancing is improvised; leaders choose steps based on the partnership's shared knowledge and skill level. But competitive ballroom dancing is choreographed, planned, and set in advance—dancers often will practice the same routines for years, even decades. Even though both the leader and the follower already know the order of their steps, they still practice the techniques involved in leading and following so that their movements feel authentic—flowing organically from one partner in one moment to the next.

As we danced, my partner and I practiced refining the points of leading and following in our choreography. He said things like, "Can you wait for my lead here?" Meaning, *you're moving before I'm ready*. I said things like, "Can you lead me more clearly here?" Meaning, *make your hand mirror the path that you would like my body to travel*. To use Newman's words, *can you keep my feet better?*

• • •

If I were to practice leading and following with God, I would ask for clearer direction on how to move forward on my spiritual path. *Make your lead mirror the path that you want me to travel*. It is not my place to tell God how to lead me, but nevertheless, communicating with heaven is so often abstract, confusing, and frustrating. How can I be connected to a Being I can't touch? How do I know if I'm moving in the right direction? How am I supposed to mirror God's movements? What if God is testing my ability to follow, and I'm drastically off course? Is there even a lead at all, or am I straining at empty air?

I've started to kneel beside my bed before I go to sleep each night. I stay there for a time, feeling my heart throb in my ears, feeling my feet start to go numb and tingly. I offer up my own muddled mess of doubts and hopes and feelings, straining to feel any communication from heaven. I remember what Dylan Thomas wrote, and try to follow suit: "I got into bed. I said some words to the close and holy darkness, and then I slept." I try to discern the spiritual leads prompting me toward my own *mirabilis via*, and I can almost hear the music playing. I can almost sense the rhythm. I can imagine the kinds of steps I might possibly take. But I can't feel a lead—an impulse or indication of when or where to start. The only thing I feel is a general sense that God wants me to be happy, and to use my agency to make choices that result in happiness for me, and also help those around me. That's like the leader saying, "I want you to dance."

• • •

During one recent dance class, I was particularly stumped by the intricacies of leading and following. It was early fall, and the mid-morning sunlight shone in through the large east-facing windows in the dance studio. I, along with the other dancers in the room, were slightly sweaty and out of breath from our efforts to improve our rumba technique all morning. My coach watched us dance the routine again, then turned off the music, and asked us to gather around him. He then started explaining the concept leading and following in a way I hadn't heard before. He addressed the men in the room directly, and said, "It's not about trying to trick your partner. Instead, you should be making it as clear and easy to follow your lead as possible."

He then turned to the women in the room and said, "It's not about trying to read your partner's mind. It's not about trying to guess the right steps. Instead, you need to maintain your internal rhythm. Continue moving to the music, and don't anticipate the lead that is coming. Live in the moment."

He then spoke to us all as a group and said, "Leading is about listening. The leader offers a lead like a gift to their partner, but can't dictate how that person receives it or interprets it. Both partners need to be sensitive to each other." I stood there in my high-heeled shoes, shifting my weight from foot to foot. I felt relieved that I could stop the futile exercise of trying to read my partner's mind, relieved that I could stop worrying about what step would come next.

• • •

Maybe my conception of my role as follower has been lacking in imagination. I used to think that all a follower had to do was trust the leader to dictate what they should do next. I thought obedience was the only required skill, and a fairly easy one at that. But through time and practice, I've learned that

being a follower doesn't mean I wait for my leader to tell me what to do, like a soldier waiting for orders. Quite the contrary.

Being a follower means taking responsibility for the presentation of my craft. Being a follower means actively revising my own artistic choices: to turn as slowly as if moving through honey, or as quickly as the recoil of a tightly wound spring; to stretch all my muscles and bones as high as possible, suspending myself into weightlessness—or to compress the space between my bones and muscles until I become low, grounded, and as heavy as a mountain. Being a follower means claiming my own identity as a dancer as something that is nuanced, complex, and unique—something that cannot be reduced to a set of instructions my partner gives to me through pressure in my hands. My own agency plays a big part in the beauty of a dance.

• • •

Thinking of my relationship with God through the lens of ballroom dancing is helpful to a point. This metaphor gives me some sort of terminology I can use to make sense of my connection to God—some kind of framework through which to interpret the signals I send and receive from earth to heaven. This metaphor helps me think of God as my partner, a compassionate person who wants to take care of me and help me realize my full, powerful potential. It helps me think of God as a person with whom I can play, brainstorm, and argue.

But this metaphor starts to break down because in real life, my dance partner is not a divine, omniscient, omnipotent God. In real life, I don't get immediate feedback on how well or poorly I followed a spiritual lead, nor can I dictate which kind of lead God gives me. Real life is more improvised than it is choreographed. So, as I write this, I start to question the ability of a single metaphor to describe the nature of an infinite, inscrutable God. Metaphors are certainly helpful in conceptualizing certain elements of my spirituality, but they will always

be limited. In short, God will always be bigger than my metaphors.

But as dumbfounding and frustrating and mind-blowing as it is to recognize God's bigness, it is also freeing and empowering. If I accept that there are some things about God I will never understand in this life, then I can stop trying to read God's mind. I can stop worrying about what comes next, and instead take ownership over my spiritual steps in this present moment. I can choose to put my feet in God's keeping.

Because, God, we both know that I'm using synecdoche here, and when I say keep Thou my feet, *I'm really saying, keep Thou my soul. Keep me company. Keep me safe. Keep Thou my dancing and my essays. Keep Thou my faith and my doubts. Keep Thou my plans and hopes and dreams. I'll try not to anticipate or second guess, but keep dancing to my internal rhythm.*

Lead Thou me on.

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SAMANTHA SMITH

Delaware and Pink Crayons

At eight years old, I am city league soccer and the gap between my teeth and the Gummy candies I find in the pantry the day after Christmas, which is the final piece in the puzzle that clues me in to the realization that Santa is, in fact, my parents. My birthday party is pirate themed, and the cake is shaped like a ship, and I have two pieces. Everyone is wearing their swimsuits and eye patches and we giggle and say "Ahoy, matey!" while my mother snaps pictures with her camera and my dad walks around with a trash bag and throws away the discarded wrapping paper that is covering the living room floor. I am Christine from *Phantom of the Opera*, or at least I pretend to be because the movie is my latest childhood fixation, and I play "Music of the Night" at my first piano recital in a brown plaid puff sleeve dress, and I don't feel beautiful because I'm not thinking about beauty, I'm thinking about how I would like to dress up as a pink crayon for Halloween.

At age ten I am the debate club and the cursive S I have been perfecting and the double Dutch jump rope that I practice diligently after school, while my friends chant "ice cream, soda, cherry on top, who's your boyfriend I forgot." I am the

winner of my class spelling bee, which means I advance to the school spelling bee, and I almost mess up the word "quinine," but I don't, and I win that spelling bee too. After school I practice the piano for thirty minutes after complaining for twenty minutes about practicing the piano, and then I call my best friend, Bailey, on the landline, and I have her number memorized because I call her every day at this time. Her mom keeps a jar full of candy on the entryway table in her home, and we can eat out of it whenever we want. My mom says we can only have sweets on Sunday, for dessert, or on birthdays. I like going to Bailey's house. In class, I memorize where each state goes on the map and my assigned state project is on Delaware (it was the first state ever) and one Friday afternoon my friend Adyson comes to school and tells us that she started her period, and my girlfriends and I are in shock and in awe and we listen reverently to her as she tells us how to insert a tampon.

At thirteen I am junior high and my very own locker that makes me feel eighteen and the lunch table I sit at every day and the posters I make to run for student government (I don't win) and the choir class I attend for 4th period every day. My favorite thing we sing that year is "Without Love" from *Hairspray* and I am jealous of the sopranos who get the melody and really the altos should get more credit because holding a harmony is surely harder. I am the violin and the only song I know how to play is "Hot Cross Buns," but I still decide to join the school orchestra, and I'm not good but I have not yet reached the point in life where being bad at something means I shouldn't do it. I am taller than all the boys in my grade and on Valentine's Day I don't get a candygram, and I wonder if these two things are related and for the first time in my life, I begin to wish that I took up less space. In Sunday School, I learn about the Word of Wisdom, and to abstain from drugs and alcohol and coffee and tattoos because my body is a gift, and I should treat it as such. I understand that my body is a temple. I wish I had a smaller temple.

At sixteen I am high school and a driver's license and the homecoming dance, and the boy I like doesn't ask me and he asks someone else, who is shorter and blonder and weighs 30 lbs. less than I do and my brain files all this away as information that is Very Important. My best friend breaks up with her boyfriend and she's in a bad spot, and one day we sit in her kitchen and we both download My Fitness Pal, and I don't know it then, but that blue app will stay on my phone for the next five years, screaming at me from my phone even though apps can't scream. That year, I do a lot of math, as I tally up calories in bread and cereal and sticks of gum. My mother doesn't make comments about my body, but she makes plenty about her own, and really, it's the same thing. In church one day we watch a video about a father who runs marathons and pushes his disabled son in a wheelchair while he runs them. I think about my working legs and arms and brain that could run marathons if I wanted to. I think about my working legs and arms and brain that so many people don't have. *I'm sorry I hate my working legs and arms and brain, God, but I do*. On the bright side, it's Sunday, which means my mom will let me make brownies, and so I'll make sure I leave enough calories to eat a couple.

At eighteen I am college and my own apartment and heaven forbid, even with that wretched blue app and the tears and the math and the counting, I am the freshman fifteen, and people in the world are sick and dying and hurting but to me, to my brain, to my body, there is nothing worse than the jeans in my closet that no longer fit me. While the notes I take in my biology class are half-hearted at best, my brain takes note of plenty of other things. Boobs only count if you have a small waist. Eating out for dinner is fine if you don't eat anything else all day. Rice cakes only have 15 calories, and if I buy the chocolate flavor, I can almost pretend what I'm eating doesn't taste like the Styrofoam my mom stores our Christmas nativity

in. I want to say all of this is irrational, but I can't, and I won't, because all I know is that I've learned that how I look is what I'm worth, and it's all I've known and it's what I've been told and even if I'm smarter than all of this, I have made the decision to play the game if it's the only way I will get what I want.

At twenty, I am thinner and blonder than I have ever been, and more people look at me and it feels nice. Sometimes, I wonder what I would think about if I weren't spending so much time thinking about my body, if there had never been the homecoming dance and the blue app and before my mom had said that she hasn't worn a swimsuit in fifteen years because she doesn't like how she looks. I don't know. I don't remember what it was like to be the Pink Crayon Girl, who lived for moments and not calories. I don't feel like a girl who knows an inordinate number of facts about Delaware, a girl who has a knack for spelling. My body is a temple. I don't like my temple.

At twenty-one, I run some errands with a friend who needs to drop something off at her grandmother's house, and while we visit, her grandma offers us a slice of cake from the fridge but lets us know that she won't be having any because at ninety-one, she needs to watch her figure. At ninety-one she needs to watch her figure. *At ninety-one she is thinking about her figure. At ninety-one, she is not eating a slice of cake from her fridge because she is thinking about her body, and she has been thinking about her body for her entire life and she is going to die thinking about her body.* Suddenly, I am no longer standing in the house of my friend's grandmother, but seeing myself seventy years from now, lying in a hospital bed, suffering from some terminal ailment that a ninety-one-year-old would suffer from. The nurse comes through the door with a cafeteria tray of too hot or too cold hospital food and I politely hold up my hand and say, "No chocolate pudding, please. But any rice cakes, by chance?" And maybe the strange look the nurse will give me will not be

enough for me to understand the gift I've wasted. Maybe it won't be enough to squeeze the hand of my granddaughter one last time, days or minutes or seconds from death and realize that I am passing down the hatred for my body like a family heirloom, like an expensive oil painting in a will. Maybe I will not understand the gift I've wasted until I am met with God Himself, with nothing to say to Him about pink crayons or Delaware or the debate club. And though my relationship with God is complex at times, I know that I do not want to tell Him that what I did with my arms and legs and lungs full of air was memorize the nutrient make-up of a Cliff bar.

At this moment, I promise myself that I will not die thinking about my body.

I take two pieces of cake.

KAYLA WILLIAMS

Sea Glass

Broken

I broke a lot of glass as a child: plates, cups, my mom's figurines and decorations, and probably more. And then I got siblings, who continued my legacy. If we were lucky, the glass would just chip around the edges a little bit, nothing major. Other times, the glass might crack, breaking into several pieces—broken pieces, but pieces that theoretically could have been glued back together if my mom had deemed it worth her time. But the scariest and most dangerous times were when the glass would fall and completely shatter—sending shards and chips flying and scurrying everywhere—under the cabinets, on the counter, and if we weren't careful, in our feet and fingers. And to make it even worse, the glass that shattered always happened to be clear, meaning you could only find it if it was a big enough chunk, or if you just so happened to catch the light glimmering off of it long enough to know it was there.

Whenever we had shattered glass, the protocol was always to get shoes on, get the little ones away from the kitchen, and get the broom. Usually my mom would clean it up, out of fear of us getting impaled with glittery sharp pieces of what was

once a flower vase. But as I got older, I would help, and was always amazed at just how far the shards would travel; amazed, and afraid that I would miss some. But just in case of a straggling sliver, my mom would always mop the floors in an effort to protect our soft little feet as best as she could.

Eventually, we more or less stopped breaking things as our hands got bigger, and we understood how our bodies moved, and we had enough experience to make better judgments. But what I didn't know about getting older, is that even though you stop dropping Pyrex pans and Corelle plates, there are other things that start breaking. As my mom always says: "Little kids, little problems, but big kids mean big problems."

In high school, I thought that the boy who wouldn't date me because I wasn't popular enough for him was a big problem. Later, I thought that getting my first B in a class was a big problem. I thought that having A lunch period instead of B lunch period was a big problem. And I guess back then, they were big problems. But I still felt like I knew who I was. I was a good student, the captain of Thespian Club, the lead in the school musical, a big sister, a devoted girlfriend, and a Broadway-wannabe.

And I think it's partially because from the ages of five to eighteen, you always know what comes next. You'll move up a grade, then summer comes, and you move up again. There are the rites of passage of dating, dances, proms, GPAs, standardized tests, driver's licenses, and extracurriculars. There's never really a need to look around, or learn how to stand on your own because you always know where you are headed; you always know who you are. Or, more accurately, you always know who you think you are.

For me, the concept of "identity" has always been incalculably important. I have always craved definitions for myself—titles and words to construct some knowable and lovable and unique "me" that I can share with everyone around me, and they can recognize as uniquely me. Because of this, I take personality

tests almost religiously. I align my view of myself with the shows I watch, the music I listen to, the clothes I wear. I choose hobbies, personality traits, and media all with the goal of curating the version of myself that I want to be, and that I want everyone else to see.

As I passed the eighteen years on earth mark, I started slipping and sliding down muddy cliffs that I hadn't even realized I had climbed in the first place.

My "identity" as I knew it shattered, I didn't know who I was anymore. I started struggling with mental illness, something that I had never expected for myself. I served a mission and went home after thirteen months due to severe depression. I got married but didn't get the fairytale that I had thought we would have. I switched majors from performing, something I had always dreamed of, to doing to something that was "ordinary." English.

I learned what real, true heartbreak feels like. The type that feels raw and red and alien, where your muscles don't know what to do, so they contract and release over and over and over again. I felt the weight of my grief from my toes to my hair follicles, in my stomach, and in my arteries. It was a sorrow so deep, so aching, that all I wanted to do was force it into the ground, into the air, into the cushions of my couch—anywhere but inside of my body, where I swore it would tear me apart. I couldn't hold it all by myself anymore.

And I guess I started to feel like a shard of broken glass—sharp on the edges, just a fragment of the "whole" that I used to be. If I wasn't a vase, or a fine-china plate, or a floral vintage mug, I didn't know what to be other than broken.

There's a Japanese art form called Kintsugi, which is characterized by its ability to take broken things—pottery, vases, ceramics—and make them more beautiful *because* they were broken. The artist will take this broken thing and put it back together, but adding gold where the cracks were, resulting in

one-of-a-kind pieces that are valuable because of what they have been through.

Kintsugi pieces are truly beautiful. And the concept of my "brokenness" being worth it in the end used to comfort me. It gave me hope that there was a purpose to the suffering. But eventually, even that thought became too hard to bear—I didn't want there to be a purpose, I just wanted to feel better. I just wanted to be okay.

Water

Hidden along the coast of Northern California, is the little town of Fort Bragg. Over a hundred years ago, residents of the area decided to make the coastline—the ocean—their garbage dumping grounds. For years, they sent glass bottles, trash, and even machinery, into the tumbling waves below. Eventually, environmentalists organized a clean-up effort, but the remarkable thing they found is that the ocean had already started its own form of clean-up, leaving the coast glittering with piles of red, brown, green, blue, and clear glass that was smoothed, rounded, and frosted by the rolling waves of the ocean. These pieces of glass, found in Fort Bragg and on beaches around the world, are known as sea glass.

Out of the four elements, water is colloquially understood as the "calm" element—peaceful, flowing, and graceful. Fire is destruction, power, heat, scorch, and flame. Red, bright, and loud. Earth is solid—rock, sturdy, reliable, protective, and constant. And air is transient and free. Playful, even. It tickles the back of your neck and flits away when you turn around to look.

In nearly any culture or religion, water is a sacred symbol, representing calmness, birth and rebirth, purity, clarity, cleanliness, knowledge, and peace. Think of baptisms, blessings, the washing of feet, and washing in general. We admire rushing rivers and glimmering streams, we jump in shallow puddles and splash in tide pools. We swim in broad lakes and wade in the

ocean, bracing ourselves against waves and sea spray. Water brings and supports life—it is rushing, foaming, swirling, running, dripping, ebbing, flowing, rising, trickling. It is tranquil, peaceful, soft, and healing. We drink it, bathe in it, rinse with it, cook with it, worship with it. We sweat, we cry, we exhale. Water is woven into our inner beings—into the fibers of our cultures, religions, bodies, and souls.

And even though we so widely understand the beauty and gentle properties of water, we often forget to recognize the power that comes with water. After all, it isn't fire that cut through sheets of prehistoric rock to form the Grand Canyon. It isn't air that hollowed out caves and caverns. Earth cannot erode itself. Water, with all its softness and peace and healing, carves canyons and smooths the sharp edges of glass. Water, graceful and rushing and cleansing, creates while it takes away.

Divine Love

I have always loved the plan of salvation. Or, using my favorite title for it, the plan of happiness. Learning that I existed before I was born, and that I will keep living after I die made me feel so special and whole. Knowing this plan helped me understand that God really is a Loving Heavenly Father who wants us to come back and live with Him again. I felt loved, and hopeful.

On my mission, I always wanted to start with the plan of happiness when teaching new people. I felt like it was important to tell them *why* they should want the gospel to be true, before teaching them the nitty-gritty, sometimes hard to grasp concept of the Restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The plan is beautiful—it's evidence of a loving Heavenly Father who wants us to be with Him again. It gives life and suffering a purpose. And everyone wants to be with their families forever. Everyone wants to feel special and loved. Right?

Over the course of the thirteen months that I spent serving in California, the state of my mental health rapidly declined. At

first, I was more or less able to push through it. But I increasingly felt less and less like I knew who I was. As time went on, I grew more sensitive, more moody, I had my first ever panic attack, and had the distinct thought, "I have never been happy before and I will never be happy again," running on a loop over and over and over in my mind.

What I didn't know then, was that I was suffering from major depressive disorder. I was increasingly miserable and everything felt dark and hopeless. I felt like a grenade—I could explode at any minute. I was moody, snapped at my companions, slept every chance I could get, and would cry in the shower until the water would get cold. My only solace was my hour of personal study every morning, where I would beg Heavenly Father to give me something, anything, to comfort me and help me feel like a better person and to have hope. But as soon as personal study was over, the darkness would enshroud my eyes all over again. I started taking nearly every single hour we had for meals (one for lunch and one for dinner) to go into the other room, get on my knees, and sob to Heavenly Father for the whole hour, telling Him how heavy my soul felt, how dark my future felt, begging and pleading with Him to help me, to heal me.

As a missionary, I knew logically that every trial is supposed to strengthen us and help us grow. I knew that the plan of happiness, which I so dearly loved, told us that there was a purpose to everything we go through, that every trial gets us one step closer to our divine potential. But after months and months of struggling and hurting, I had become disillusioned and bitterly asked my companion at the time, a gentle and sweet soul who met my ups and my downs and my pains with hugs and love and patience, whether God really even cared.

Angrily, I asked her, "Why *would* He even care about our struggles when He knows that according to His plan, everything will work out in the end? Does He even *care* since the

purpose of this life is just to grow anyways—if he knows that ultimately it should all be 'for my good'? Does it even *matter* to Him that I am hurting so bad that I feel hopeless if our mortal lives are just a blip in time compared to the length of eternity?"

Gently and thoughtfully, she turned my attention to the story of Lazarus and said: "Jesus already knew that he was going to bring Lazarus back to life, but he wept anyway."

He wept for the pain of Mary and Martha in the wake of losing their brother, and He wept for the loss of his friend, because even though He knew it was for but a moment, grief never feels like it will end. Pain cannot be explained away. And the gravity of his compassion and love was so important, that it gets its own verse: "Jesus wept" (John 11.35).

I like to imagine that He weeps for me too.

Mothers

I should have realized it sooner. Jesus's weeping is just like the tears of my mother, and the tears of mothers all around the world and all throughout history.

In years past, even in my ancestry, infants died all the time from disease, weakness, and poor living conditions. Modern medicine has come a long way since then, and nowadays, most infants receive anywhere from six to fifteen immunizations within their first year of life. These shots prevent disease and infection—they are a *good* thing that allow babies to stay healthy and grow. Yet even though my mom knew all these things, knew that the shots were good for me even if I, an infant, didn't understand that, her broader understanding didn't stop her from crying every single time she saw me cry after the poke of a doctor's needle.

And as I have grown up, my mom continues to cry when I cry. She has cried with me over lost friendships and high school drama, stress, and disappointment. She cries with me now, when my heart feels so broken I don't know if it will ever heal,

and when it feels like my life is falling apart and is not at all the life I thought I would have. She cries with me when I can hardly get myself to pray because everything feels so heavy, hopeless, and dark.

Sometimes I like to imagine what she would have been like when I was a baby. She was about my age when she had me, and she's told me my whole life that being a mom was her biggest dream—that I gave her that dream. I can picture her, then twenty-four, rocking me, bouncing me to sleep. I imagine her touching my cheeks, putting socks on my feet and maybe on my hands to keep me from scratching my face, and I imagine her looking at me like I am the most precious thing in the world. I bet she told me how much she loved me. I bet she tickled me, and held me close, and cradled me when I cried.

I have often heard it said that a mother's love is the closest love to the love of Christ. The closest thing to true selflessness, compassion, and loving kindness. I know that this is true with my mother.

Atonement

Pretty much anyone from any religion with any knowledge about Jesus Christ knows that He was crucified, that He died for the sins of the world, and that without Him, mankind is doomed for all eternity. The emphasis here being on sin. In the Bible, we are reminded of our fallen state, and the impossibility of our condition—of our need for a Savior. But what the Bible doesn't explicitly say is that the Atonement of Jesus Christ is for more than just redemption from sin.

I have always been a girl of more than average emotionality. I think with my heart first, brain second (if at all), and I talk about feelings more than most people do, and arguably, more than I probably should. This might be partially influenced by how many books I read growing up, touting romance, friendship, deep human connection, loss, redemption, and hope, among

many other deep and human emotions. It may also be just how I was born. Most likely, it's a little bit of both. But as a result, I have a quick temper, I get my feelings hurt too often, I overthink everything everyone says and analyze every possible meaning. I crave being *known*, I crave deep human connections, and I just feel a lot of things.

When I was thirteen or fourteen, I remember plopping onto my puffy Costco comforter in my dimly lit room, with the only light coming through the gaps in my blinds—resulting in a kind of gray and dreary atmosphere, and crying into my pillow. I was sobbing on my bed for some reason that now escapes me, but it could have been anything. . . . maybe I was feeling like I wasn't important to my friends, maybe I was fighting with my dad, or maybe I was feeling lonely. But what I do remember, is that in the midst of my tears and my loneliness, I had a very clear thought and impression that Jesus knew exactly what I was feeling. It was like this thought had been infused into my mind and was now under a spotlight. I don't remember if I stopped crying, or how long it took me to feel better, but that clarity of understanding has stuck in my mind and testimony since that day.

If Christ's Atonement was *only* designed to alleviate the pain and stain of sin, I think we would have a very different kind of God. Yet that is what most other religions and followers of Christ believe—that the sole purpose of the Atonement, of Christ's sacrifice, is to take away sin. And while that is, of course, incalculably important, a loving Father in Heaven wants us to have more than just a balm from sin, but a balm for the pains of mortal life.

In Alma 7.11–12, in the Book of Mormon, it says that Christ "shall go forth, suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of *every kind*" (emphasis added), and that he will "take upon him the pains and the sickness of his people." It says that He will "take upon him their infirmities, that his bowels may

be filled with mercy," and that He will thus know "how to succor his people according to their infirmities."

Christ not only suffered for our sins, but for the pains caused by sins, both ours and others. He suffered for any pain of any kind. He felt the afflictions of our souls, the suffering we feel in times of trial, the temptations and struggles we experience. And not only that—He suffered our sicknesses—the emotional and physical pains of cancer, strep throat, broken bones, cholera, tuberculosis, Crohn's disease, Alzheimer's, ADHD, anxiety, and depression. He suffered the pain of miscarriages, divorces, lost loved ones, financial ruin, addiction, starvation, war, heartbreak.

When He suffered in Gethsemane, the weight of every pain ever felt by anyone in the world rested on Jesus Christ, all so that He could better run to us, and hold us up during our trials.

Now

I think too often we don't talk about the hard things until they're over. Even writing this, I felt the need to gloss over the fact that I'm still on the healing path—to make it seem like everything worked out and I now have a perfect faith and a perfect hope.

I still don't really know who I am. I am still lost, still broken. I still have days where I am angry, where I feel hopeless, and I don't see the point. And it wasn't until recently that I even noticed how much Christ has been holding me up. For a long time, I felt like I was alone, but now that I've felt it, I know He is there.

I am relearning that God loves me—that He *is* a loving Father in Heaven. I'm relearning how to talk to Him, relearning how to recognize His hand in my life. I hold onto the comforting words of my bishop years ago. He told me to remember and to trust that Heavenly Father included my happiness in His plan. And if Heavenly Father planned for my happiness, I can survive being tossed through salty currents and rough surf

and rolling waves. I can be a piece of sea glass, being rounded, smoothed, and beautified by the Living Water. I want the Savior to take away my sharp edges and help me to be something whole again.

When you find a piece of sea glass on the beach, no one knows if it was originally part of a beer bottle, a vase, a Mason Jar. All they know is that that piece of sea glass is whole and beautiful all by itself. It has been made perfect by the healing and refining power of the water. Right now, I may be a shard from a broken bottle, but through Christ, the Living Water, I can be smooth and whole and beautiful.

Biographical Notes

Samuel Charles is a mechanical engineering student with a minor in global women's studies. He has a myriad of other interests, including writing, animation, and music. He grew up speaking German at home, studied French in high school, and served as a missionary in the Russia Novosibirsk Mission. Sam spends his time writing stories and music, going on trips with friends, and staying up late studying in the BYU library, where he also works as a teacher for software and design classes. He loves spending time with his family and discussing the deep meanings of the gospel—especially metaphors that help him understand himself, others, and the world better.

Ariana Feichko is an undergraduate history major with a minor in creative writing who loves to read and write. She hopes to publish her own collection of poetry and personal essays, as well as fantasy and historical fiction novels. In addition to her passion for writing, Ariana is studying history and anthropology to become a museum curator, archivist, and educator.

Alanna Hess is an undergraduate English major and member of the BYU Honors Program from Mapleton, Utah. She dabbles in writing everything from poetry to fantasy novels, and she dreams of wielding the magic of words as a professional author.

Mauri Pollard Johnson is a current MFA student studying creative nonfiction at BYU. Her work has been published in *Punctuate, Inscape, Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, and she has an upcoming publication with *The Normal School*. She was born and raised in American Fork, Utah, and still lives there with her husband/childhood sweetheart and their spunky calico kitty. When she isn't writing or reading, you can find her walking outside in the sunshine, watching reruns of *Frasier*, or spending time with her younger sisters.

Nicholas Rex loves feeling, thinking, and music—especially that of Leif Vollebekk, Ólafur Arnalds, and John Denver. He loves nature—especially ferns, mosses and cinnamon. Currently, he is obsessed with the word "pirouette," although he doesn't know how to do one. He is learning that love is our greatest and hardest work.

Isaac James Richards is a graduate student at BYU, where he teaches classes in both the English Department and the School of Communications. He has published poetry in *Irreantum*, prose in *Y-Magazine*, and criticism in *The Explicator*. His scholarship and creative writing have also appeared in other venues, including *BYU Studies Quarterly, Explorations in Media Ecology, The Journal for the History of Rhetoric*, and *The Journal of American Culture*.

Sarah Safsten is a current MFA student studying creative nonfiction. Her work has recently been published in journals such as *Inscape, Exponent II*, and *Sky Island Journal*. When she isn't reading or writing essays, you might find her ballroom dancing and making Korean food with her husband.

Samantha Smith graduated in advertising this past spring. Her favorite holiday is Halloween. Her least favorite trope is enemies to lovers. The email she made in 4th grade is lovely-unicorns@hotmail.com.

Fleur Van Woerkom is from Pacifica, California. She loves going on long walks, admiring flowers, and listening to the ocean. She studied editing, writing, and dance at BYU.

Megan McOmber Wight is an MFA graduate student studying creative nonfiction. She can most often be found running, baking cookies with her husband, or reading the same book for the eighth time to her eighteen-month-old daughter. She feels grateful to be writing and thinking and breathing every day.

Eden Williams is a freshman from Idaho. She loves music, art, hiking, yoga, reading, and writing. She is an animal lover who loves her friends and family. She is also an avid Disney and Harry Potter fanatic. Currently studying social science, she hopes to one day teach high school to change the world through education.

Kayla Williams is currently and English major, mostly for the pretty words she gets to read and write. She also loves writing songs, singing, thrifting, and learning new hobbies. She is so unbelievably honored by this opportunity and hopes her words can touch those who read them.