



# *Windhover*

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A Journal of Christian Literature

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## A Journal of Christian Literature

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*Mark E. Harden*

**LESSON**

a poor imitation of its namesake,  
its fiberglass blades fractured beyond repair,  
the broken Black Hawk plummets—

Icarus found  
that folly trumps technology...  
be them titanium or wax,  
wings will fail—  
only gods may glide free  
on warm sea winds

*Philip C. Kolin*

AN AUTOPSY OF THE CRUCIFIXION

Two millenniums later  
Doctors perform  
An autopsy  
On Christ on the cross—

How did he die?  
They probe scars,  
Measure the oxygenation  
Of His blood,  
The number of respirations  
He could or could not  
Take. How long  
His breathing would hold

Out. He spoke some words  
Clinical proof he did not die  
From suffocation, but his heart

Burst open, opening a floodgate  
Of blood rushing into the pericardial  
Sack. There it is—

They know now how Christ died  
But why is not a part  
Of their medical alphabet  
Of bodies and blood.



## *Nathan Brown*

### AT YOUR FUNERAL

They printed your poem in the funeral program without the title or the correct line breaks. But they got the words right.

They were trying, I suppose, to get it all onto one page.

Maybe that's what funerals are for. The grief is too long, and we need, somehow, to gather it up into one place...some terminal and exhausted space. Besides, they did do a fairly good job of following your specific orders.

Well... except that they held it in the church sanctuary, I'm afraid. Sorry about that. But, my friend, too many people loved you, and most of them showed up. The smaller room—the one you'd wanted—wasn't up to the gentle outpouring of muted sobs and stunted laughter.

But the stories from the pulpit were good, and they marked your desire for a touch of irreverence quite well. I could sense that God, in the robe and slippers of a Tuesday morning, was relaxed and having a much better time with your crazy, eclectic clan than the more acute company he's required to dress up for on Sundays.

And, as usual, I got no clear answers from him to the questions I had about you.

I don't know why it would've been such a bother just to let me know that the angels had in fact greeted you with a tray of salt-rimmed margaritas and that you were, finally, able to hold two at once.

But I've learned over time to accept the silence he's compelled to honor and to walk with him in my own irascible way on the cold back highway she's led me down—

collar up...  
hands in pockets...  
mouth mostly shut.

*Sarah Rehfeldt*

WHAT THE LIGHT CAN CONJURE

If you find it  
(and it may  
find you unexpectedly),  
hold onto it with your eyes  
for a very long time.  
Stretch it out against the evening  
before it disappears.  
If you're lucky,  
you can watch it go  
back to where it came from.

*Jacqueline Kolosov*

## THE WORLD ACCORDING TO MY DAUGHTER

## Why

“Why do birds sing, Mommy?” “Because they can.” “But why?” “Because God gave them beautiful voices.” “Why?” “So that everyone, including you, could enjoy their song.” “Why?” A monosyllabic question is my two and a half year old daughter’s favorite word at the moment. Not surprising, for toddlers are appetitive creatures of immense curiosity. Why does the moon come out at night? Why does the sun go away? Why do birds sing? All of these questions have answers, but not answers I can articulate simply. How do I explain the movements of the planets? And even if I could explain the architecture of a day bound by sun and moon, the underlying ‘why’ remains. Why does the moon rise? Why? The question itself runs up against the ultimate mystery: why are we here at all?

*Why* derives from the Old English *hwi*. It feels very natural that the people who gave us *Cædmon’s Hymn* would also give us *why* since both depend upon an acknowledgment, indeed an acceptance of mystery. In Bede’s *Ecclesiastical History*, Cædmon is described as one “to whom the gift of poetry was divinely given.” Yet it wasn’t always this way. In his pre-poetry life, Cædmon was without music: “And so it was that sometimes at the table, when the company was set to be merry and had agreed that each man should sing in his course, he, when he saw the harp to be coming near him, would rise up in the midst of supper and going out get him back to his own house.” Until, one night, while trying to escape the music, he goes to the stable and falls asleep. There, a man speaks to him in his dreams. “Cædmon,” the man says, “sing me something.” Initially, Cædmon protests that he cannot sing, but when the man says again, “Sing me something, Cædmon,” he does. Cædmon sings about the creation of the world, and in the process his life as a poet begins.

Children are poets, reawakening in us an attentiveness to language that we might otherwise not recover. “What do you get when you mix red and yellow?” my husband Bill asks. “Rellow” is Sophie’s response. “We don’t have tails,” she tells us tonight. “We have tushies.”

“Ba, ba, black sheep, have you any wool...” She will sing out the entire piece at the top of her lungs, whether she’s spinning in circles on the front lawn or sitting on the steps in the university kiddie pool.

“Sing to me, Mommy,” she says every night before I tuck her into bed. Although I am a capable enough poet, like the stable-sheltered Cædmon I am no musician, having actually held a pantomime solo in a junior high musical, a role that led a few teachers and classmates to conclude I must be deaf.

But when Sophie asks me to sing, I do not protest, returning instead to the songs my own mother sang to me: “Que sera, sera,” and several lyrics from “The Sound of Music.” With her cheek pressed against my own, we bring the words forth together, so that I begin to feel the notes rising from deep within my body. With the moon coming in through the curtains, I dare to believe ours is a pitch perfect melody.

### Hot Pink Sneakers

I call my mom and tell her that Sophie is obsessed with her new sneakers: hot pink suede and white canvas. We bought them at Target on my birthday. “My birthday, Mommy,” she said. In a figurative sense it’s true, for we began the day on the bucket swings at the neighborhood park before driving to Target to buy her some new clothes and of course, the sneakers. The only thing we didn’t do was buy her the helium balloons she requested over breakfast.

“They’re good running shoes,” my husband said when she showed him the sneakers which she insisted on wearing to bed. Modeling herself after Mommy, the long distance runner, Sophie has begun running, pumping her arms as she follows the gravel path bordering the park across the street from our home. “Come on, Mommy,” she calls out. “Follow me!”

She falls less than she did just a few months ago. These days, it’s usually while holding our corgi’s leash and crying, “I’m running with my dog. Look, Mommy, I’m running with my dog.” Seconds later, the dog will lurch forward after a squirrel or a cat, and Sophie will be sprawled on the pavement crying. “Do you want me to hold Eddie’s leash?” I’ll ask after brushing her off. Always, she shakes her head. “I hold Eddie’s leash,” she says firmly.

Despite the sneakers, the sturdiest shoes in her current wardrobe, she remains a toddler. The word is Scottish in origin and refers to the unsteady steps of a little child. Today we consider children between the ages of one and three years to be toddlers, a two year span defined by a child’s learning to walk, talk, and view herself as a separate person. According to the experts, tantrums, that central aspect of the so-called Terrible Twos, are the result of a child testing the boundaries between herself and her world.

"I don't like Katherine," she tells me after I pick her up from her playgroup. "Why?" I ask. "What did she do?" "I don't like Katherine," Sophie says again. Unable to extract a concrete answer, I conclude that Sophie is probably jealous of the bond between Katherine and Zoe, who spend most of the week together. "Zoe is my friend," Sophie once said, 'my' and 'mine' being critical words in her vocabulary.

Sophie may be part of the continent of our family, but she is increasingly becoming a self-defined being, a little country who knows what she wants. (Worth mentioning, perhaps is that the word *boundary* derives from the Latin *bonnarium*: piece of land with a fixed limit.) "Bobcat, Mommy," she will say, insisting I crowd Bobcat into her already crowded bed at night. "And Baby, Mommy, I need Baby." Almost none of Sophie's dolls or stuffed animals have names other than the name identifying their species: Bunny, Duck, Bobcat. The exception is Mommy Bear and Baby Bear, a twosome she likes to keep close together. As she likes to keep me close. Until I weaned her last month, I doubt she recognized a clear boundary between her body and my own. "My mommy," she liked to say. "Mine."

At Target, Sophie immediately identified the hot pink sneakers as 'mine'. Given the preponderance of pink in her two year old life, I tried to steer her towards another color. "No, Mommy," she said. "I want pink." "Well," a friend said when I told her of our outing, "at least Sophie knows what she wants." Does she ever. Put another way: Heaven help us. What will she be like at three?

### Cactus's Ankles

This morning Sophie calls Cactus on the toy phone she has brought to the hair salon. "You okay?" she asks in between admiring her newly cropped bangs, having accompanied her dad for his haircut. "Someone try to eat you?"

I'm not surprised by the question since I'm the one who told her cactus grow 'prickles' in order to prevent other creatures from eating them. Sophie transformed *prickles* into *ankles*. "We don't touch cactus's ankles," she said when we came close enough to see the spines on a well-established prickly pear.

Toddlers like repetition, constants. This is the reason she eats macaroni and cheese at least every other day; and this is also the reason we began visiting cacti this summer, seeking them out on our evening bicycle rides. Within a ten block radius we quickly located colonies of prickly pear and agave, as well as rarer cholla and aloe plants. "That agave's hiding, Mommy," Sophie told me once, pointing to a two foot plant sheltered by a nest of Pampas Grass. "Sshh, Mommy," she said the next time we passed it. "Agave's sleeping."

Although I walked the neighborhood streets for several years before Sophie's birth, often finding something new—from a chandelier within a quixotic pergola to a sweet pea vine threading a street lamp—it is Sophie who taught me to personify the landscape. "Yes, we can visit Stump on our way home," I will often reply as we pedal back from the grocery store. "Poor Stump," Sophie said once, wrapping her arms around the three foot remains of a species of tree I can no longer identify, so weathered by sun and rain and wind has it become.

"We don't touch Cactus's ankles," she says again this afternoon, this time to her friend Zoe who lives down the street from the hugest prickly pear colony around, one that stretches the length of the house. Intrigued by her certainty that cactus has ankles, I check the etymology and discover that *Tarsos* is the Greek for ankle. It comes from the Greek *teresesthai*: to be or become dry. The actual word for the cactus's prickles is spine from the Old French *espine*, meaning backbone or thorn, also prickle. Without being conscious of doing so, my daughter has intuited a relationship between cactus and ankle and spine. *Ankle* is a very human word, as is *spine*, the official word for the cactus's prickles. Perhaps it is natural, then, Sophie's conversations with Cactus, for always it is the singular Cactus she is calling, though I'm not sure if it's the colony on Twenty-second Street or the smaller plant a few blocks away that shelters the flame-tipped salvia. "You okay, Cactus?" Sophie says again later. "Don't let anybody eat you."

## Play

People who laugh live longer. That's what the experts say. I laugh more since Sophie has come into my life. And who wouldn't laugh at a two-year-old admiring her belly in the mirror after she takes a break from naked yoga on her purple mat. Like a lot of toddlers, she likes to strip down to the skin. Who can blame her? She spends 99% of the time in a diaper. No matter the cotton lining, plastic just doesn't breathe, and of course there's the tape.

But I don't always laugh. Sometimes, despite all the childcare books that stress calm and control, I lose it. I stand there and scream, and on occasion I've burst into tears. I'm learning that the only way to avoid meltdown with a toddler is by taking experience in stride. Take my birthday outing to Target. Within an hour, I've chased Sophie down multiple times. Finally, in order to keep her still, I find myself pushing her around the store in a display stroller that cannot accommodate our purchases. I've injured the tendon in my right hand, so I'm trying to steer with the left. It isn't easy. By the time we arrive at the checkout counter, I smell a poop diaper.

Outside, it's ninety-nine degrees and the car has been sitting in the lot for over an hour. Waiting until we arrive home is therefore not an option. "Where's the ladies room?" I ask the cashier.

It is only once I've laid Sophie on paper towel on the changing table I realize I have wipes but not a diaper. The diaper is in the car. Sophie emptied out the contents of my backpack en route to the store. After wiping her off, I carry her, bare bottom and all, to the children's section. "Walk, Mommy," she protests. "I walk." "Not now, Sophie," I say. "I have to get you into a diaper." I grab the Pampers and hurry over to the boys department, which is carpeted. There, I lay her down and get her into a diaper in record time, thanks to her compliance. Meaning: she doesn't kick or roll over.

At Toys 'R' Us earlier this summer, I didn't smell the poop diaper until it had smeared onto my dress and completely soiled her own shorts. Not only did I have to change her in the store that day, but I had to buy her a new outfit. "Well," a friend said philosophically, "at least you were in the right place. Diapers, twenty-four-month-old wear and a spacious changing room all right there."

Right. So I'm learning to laugh more, a good thing for a writer predisposed to the work of Paul Celan, Anna Akmatova, Virginia Woolf, and the Brontes. I'm learning, day by day, though those boundary-testing tantrums—for which the etymology remains intriguingly unclear—remain the biggest challenge. The biggest of the big was the episode in the locker room at the pool last week. Sophie was in the midst of her first solo shower using the hand-held nozzle, and she had soaked the tile floor just beyond. "Time to come out now," I said. "No." "Two more minutes, Sophie." What I always forget is that for toddlers time is not a working concept. I wound up pulling her out kicking and screaming. I had just managed to lay Sophie on the changing table when she kicked me and pulled my hair, while spitting out a slew of swear words that blended the choicest bits of Bill's and my own worst vocabulary. Everyone knows locker rooms have great acoustics. Suffice it to say, all of the other women and children heard Sophie's outpouring. "What did you do?" a friend asked later. "Held her hands down so I could dress her while telling her, very calmly, not to kick and pull hair and say 'naughty' words." "You should have given her a time out." "Yeah?" I stared back at her. "Where?" On the slippery tile floor? In a shower stall? On the toilet? (She might have fallen in.)

"So what did you do, Jackie?" my mom asked once I recounted the episode. "What else?" I said. "I laughed."

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## POETRY

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## PROSE:

## FICTION, ESSAYS, INTERVIEWS, AND REVIEWS

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