



Windhover

A Journal of Christian Literature

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Daye Phillippo

Centuries

*Still, all the history of the world
happens at once.* —Jean Valentine
“Then Abraham”

June in every way—blue sky, sun warming the old earth
as beautiful young Abishag warms feeble King David.

Birds and breeze, leaves and leafshadow moving over
the open book and notebook, table where I sit to read.

Adonijah takes Joab and Abiathar into his confidence.
The barn cat, dusty black tabby, curls around my ankles.

Silos across the road. Dried corn, gold rushing, claiming
the grain truck’s hold the way Adonijah claims the throne.

A lone orange marigold rises above in its ceramic pot.
“May my lord King David live forever!” exalts Bathsheba.

Redwing blackbirds *okalee!* from across the pasture.
A ram’s horn is sounding at the spring of Gihon.

Grain truck rumbles away, the next pulls forward. A tiny spider
travels below the counsel of Zadok and Nathan the Prophet.

Solomon is anointed. The earth trembles with the noise of joy.
White yarrow, tall and stately, stirs the air above the deadnettle.

I stir my tea, turn the page. Centuries pass. (Or don’t.)
A man, lame forty years, walks. Peter and John are arrested.

A fat bee browses the spirea. The Sanhedrin interrogates, but
releases the zealots for fear of stirring riot. Squirrels chirr

in the hollow bole of the silver maple. Would I have spoken
or kept silent? Goldflame spirea, bright corymbs of fuchsia.

A crow calls from the barnlot, a blue jay from the forest.
An ant walks over *the meeting place shook,*
and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit.

*I Kings 1: 1-53 & Acts 4: 1-37, *The One Year Bible*, June 6

Ryan Napier

Lift High

Adults always had the same question. David had a good answer. He told them that when he grew up he wanted to be a paleontologist.

This answer seemed to please them. Some laughed. All smiled.

“The word,” said one adult, David’s uncle, “is bigger than you are.” The other adults laughed at David’s uncle.

A few weeks later, David told another adult that he wanted to be a paleontologist. This adult smiled. “My uncle says that the word is bigger than I am,” David said. The adult smiled some more. David was very pleasing.

In truth, David did not want to be a paleontologist. He wanted to be a pastor, or perhaps a soldier. He liked dinosaurs, but he loved uniforms.

He spent most of his life in uniform.

Monday through Friday, it was the uniform of St. John’s Lutheran School—blue pants, black leather shoes, white collared shirt with the St. John’s eagle stitched over the heart. At the beginning of every year, the school gave David five new shirts. This was part of his scholarship, and it gave him great hope. Whenever he felt himself begin to twitch at the other boys—whenever they had money for ice cream and he didn’t, whenever they talked about their pools and Playstations—he could touch the eagle stitched over his heart and know who he was. David didn’t have to pay to go to St. John’s. All the other boys paid a little bit extra, and that money went to him. He was so smart that the other boys had paid for the shirt on his back.

On Saturdays his uniform was baggy black shorts, secondhand shin-guards, and the city-league soccer shirt. His number, 85, was surrounded by a circle of local business logos. He did not like soccer: he was too stubby for any position but defense. And he did not like his teammates, who all went to public school. The only thing worse than boys who were better than him was boys who were not better than him. The uniform was his only relief. He was a knight, and the shin-guards were his armor. He felt very strong and safe when the ball or a foot thwacked against his shin-guards, and he was sure the other boys must feel the same. He did not even try to hit the ball: he aimed his kicks at the other boys’ legs, and he felt no guilt.

His favorite uniform was the one he wore on Sundays.

David was the acolyte at St. John's. He and his mother came thirty minutes before the service. She sat in the pew and read the bulletin, that long list of people who had gotten sick or gotten better or died. David went alone to the little room behind the altar. The sacristy, he told himself, the room is called the sacristy. He knew the names for almost everything.

Sometimes the room was empty. On Sundays when communion was served, David shared the room with the old woman. She poured the wine into clear plastic cups and counted out the little white wafers. David ignored her.

His uniform hung in the closet, next to the shelves with the wooden pyx and the boxes of extra wafers. The uniform had three pieces—a black floor-length robe that buttoned up the middle; a fluffy white waist-length robe; and a large wooden cross on a silver chain. He took the uniform to the bathroom and put it on over his church clothes—first the black robe, then the white robe, then the cross. He preferred to do this in the bathroom, where he could adjust the robes in the mirror.

In this uniform David used a long golden rod to light and extinguish the altar candles. In this uniform he sat in a wooden chair behind the pulpit and looked up at Pastor B.'s back as he preached. In this uniform he trailed Pastor B. along the rail, giving out the wine and collecting the empty plastic cups in a large golden bowl. In this uniform—and this was the heart of it all—he carried in the cross to start the service, and he carried out the cross to close the service.

There was a name for this too. The one who bore the cross was the crucifer. It was a good word. It was a *big* word, big as the cross. And the cross was very large. Even if its base rested on the ground, the cross was still taller than David. But, of course, its base never rested on the ground. David made sure of that. His back and shoulders tightened, but he held the cross. He was the crucifer.

He carried the cross down the center aisle, and the organ rang out the processional. Beneath the carpet, the floorboards quaked in time. David shook with them. He felt the songs—"A Mighty Fortress is Our God," "Lift High the Cross," "Onward! Christian Soldiers"—vibrate within him. The chord changes seemed to happen within his bones, to radiate outward from him and his cross.

The shaking threatened to shake the cross, but David held it tight. Pastor B. had showed him how. Right hand on top, left hand on bottom, both thumbs pointing to the ground, the center of the cross even with the top of your forehead. Back straight,

elbows locked. Keep it very still. Small, careful steps. Go slow so everyone can see.

There were one or two hundred people out there in the pews. None of them were in uniform, none of them were so close to the cross and the flames and the gold. They were looking at him, he knew, and wondering what it was like to be him, to be so smart and so good that someone always gave you special clothes to wear.

He went very slow.

*William Woolfitt***Hornet Swarm as the Sins of Mankind**

This is the dream:

people surround me, taunt and sneer,
 buzz like horseflies, throw elbows, shove against,
 straining to glimpse the convicts, the soldiers
 prodding them down the street. I see two thieves
 limp and plod, then comes blasphemy-made-flesh—
 all three scourged, bloody and staggering as they drag
 the posts they will writhe upon. I see Simon of Cyrene
 swept along like seaweed in an ebb-tide, then I am Simon,
 stepping toward the street, I take another step,
 forget that I know what happens next.

This is still the dream:

the jeerers freeze, their hiss and yammer dies out,
 silenced by a droning keen, a cloud of specks that darkens
 half the sky, then veers, comes closer, lands on him
 who calls himself temple raiser, true vine. Masses of hornets
 slip into his skin, plug his wounds, and stanch the bleeding
 for an instant, then sink into him, like cloves
 stuffing a rice pudding.

I think I'm starting to wake:

the sin-glutted man jerks like a marionette,
 his body swells, and balloons, and shrinks back down.
 Simon's hand buffets the air, my hand
 bunches the sheet, Simon can't see
 the cloud of hornet-specks,
 but I feel the evil
 in the gooseflesh on my arms,
 the sparks in my hair.

Sarah M. Wells

Time to Get a Gun

*Time to get a gun, that's what I've been thinkin'.
I could afford one if I did just a little less drinkin'.
Time to put something between me and the sun.
When the talking is over, it's time to get a gun.*

“Time to Get a Gun”—Miranda Lambert

A small wave of afternoon break-ins crested on our street of manicured lawns and no fences a few years ago. The thieves walked in through unlocked front doors and stole cell phones, iPads, and other electronic devices. My husband travels for work nearly every weekend, and he worried about me and our three children at home alone for these stretches of time.

“Don’t forget to lock the doors at night,” he urged, “I’m either buying a gun or a dog.”

The other day, someone I love repinned a photo to a Pinterest group labeled “great ideas.” It is a handgun holster for your bed, available from the online NRA store, and the photo shows a woman’s manicured hand emerging from beneath the sheets to grab her gun, secured between the mattress and the box spring. Similar images appear on occasion—queen-sized headboards with hidden gun compartments, filing cabinet turned gun storage, dresser renovated to hold a weapons arsenal—*No one would ever know if you didn’t tell them! SMART!* the caption reads underneath.

This person I love is a follower of Christ, like many of the people who appear in my Facebook newsfeed. They are thankful, grateful people. They feel blessed. They love their country.

I, too, am a follower of Christ. I am grateful. I feel blessed. I love my country. But I’m not so sure about the bedside handgun holster.

My husband and I decided on a dog, a 95-pound Doberman-coonhound mix my daughter named Beans. He didn’t start out that big. He was an overgrown puppy when we adopted him, a leaping, floppy-eared, lolling grin dog with an eager, wagging stub tail. I spent the fall we adopted him training for a half-marathon, and together we would run long miles every morning. The half-marathon took place December 3. Afterward I spent six weeks recovering from a sinus infection and not running. Beans went

from running two to four to six to eight to *ten* miles each day, to none. None at all. Not even a slow jog. He exerted his pent-up energy by sprinting laps around our small, electric-fenced yard, barking, digging holes in the yard, and chewing everything.

Beans destroyed his dog bed. Beans destroyed dolls. Beans destroyed stuffed animals. Beans destroyed Thomas the Tank Engine tracks. Beans destroyed an Adirondack chair. Beans destroyed pillows. Beans destroyed shoes. Beans destroyed clothes. In the end, it might have cost us less to just let the petty thieves rob us of our cell phones.

It became clear that Beans had to go. Our house was just too small, our lives too busy, my desire to ever run again too weak. We found a new home for Beans, a home with a larger yard and another dog to keep him company.

Beans wasn't a *bad* dog. We just didn't anticipate the negative consequences of having this dog in our house. We didn't weigh the benefits against the potential damages.

I'm not surprised or offended or even opposed to most of the posts by people I love about guns. I was raised by a man who knew how to handle guns. My dad respected them, hunted with them, and taught me how to fire one. I understand the adrenaline that burns in your palm when you hold a handgun, when you fire and hit an aluminum can and it makes that "dink" noise and lifts off its stand. I remember the sense of accomplishment, the measure of accuracy and aim when you raise your rifle to your shoulder and brace for the kickback, when you watch the clay disk bust into a hundred pieces. I have never fired a gun at an animal, but even that I can understand; I have eaten venison and turkey and duck and goose.

I even understand the impulse to want to guard yourself and the people that you love. When there's a threat to your family, imminent or distant, the instinct to protect and defend boils inside, mixed with the distinct absence of security. We felt that in the days after the break-ins on our street. But what troubles me is the undercurrent of contradiction that ripples through the conversation of gun ownership for protection from Christians like me, Christians whose declaration of faith puts Jesus as Lord, as Shelter, as Protector, as King. That same King declared peace, repaired the cut-off ear of a man who was trying to capture him, rebuked his disciple Peter for his violence.

I am amazed by the simultaneous declaration of faith in God who repeats throughout the Old and New Testament to "be not afraid" and the utter fear of *everything*. Well, that in itself isn't amazing. It's amazing that we don't acknowledge this. It's

amazing that we are okay living in a continual state of internal conflict. I include myself in this; I have imagined the worst-case scenario, I've imagined the intruder climbing the stairs of our house and opening my bedroom door, opening my children's bedroom door, imagined my finger on the trigger as he wrests my screaming children from their beds. Could I pull it? Would I pull it? In the unimaginable and highly unlikely event that an intruder would enter my home for my computer and TV, then proceed upstairs to find my children in their beds, and keep going, entering their room, could I pull the trigger? Could I face myself in the mirror each morning after, could I talk to my children about faith and courage and *be not afraid*, without some kind of psychological block, guilt and terror forever imprinted on my forehead?

There's no way to reconcile "be not afraid" and "bedside handgun holster."

"Do not be afraid" is reposted all over the place in the Bible. That message of "be not afraid" is almost always coupled with the ever-presence of God. This is faith—in spite of fear, we trust this God to honor his promise to never leave us or forsake us.

When emotions rage inside after tragedy, believers should say to God, "I am afraid. Help my fear. I am hurt. Heal me. I am angry. Help my anger. I believe. Help my unbelief." Instead, we crumple the problem up into a gun-shaped answer, rally the troops and neighbors and declare vengeance on our enemies. If we would pause a moment before deciding on a solution and go to God through prayer and meditation, we would likely hear, "Surely, I am with you always, until the end of time," and maybe the fear would recede a little. Maybe we could hand that sense of powerlessness over to the One who is omnipotent. Maybe there are measures we can take to promote peace instead of multiply violence.

After we got rid of Beans, my husband and I thought about a gun. One for protection, that is, not one to hunt or for sport or to collect dust in a gun case. One to make us feel safe. We thought about educating our three children on gun safety, on handling a gun. We thought about locking up a gun, keeping the bullets in a safe place, remembering the key code if we ever hear those heavy thuds up the stairs, those unthinkable screams.

And then we watch how our son slips a small toy into his fist he knows he isn't supposed to have and backs away from the table smiling. We know what he is hiding. Our children run around the house with toy guns playing good guys and bad guys, run upstairs and downstairs giggling. *Bang! Bang!* they laugh, handling the shiny weapon, feeling the cold power of metal.

It isn't time to get a gun.

Sally Thomas

Angelus

Be it done, you say, a noonday habit.
 Unconceived, your children wait for you.
 Neat rows of them hang quiet in the mind's
 Upstairs closet. Like dresses never worn,

Your unconceived children have been waiting.
 You told them of course you'd wear them
 Someday. The upstairs closet's long locked,
 A room outside your life. Now you stand praying

As you might stand wondering what to wear.
 Somehow it's never this dress, never that one.
 With room in your life, now you stand praying.
 One of them could choose you by surprise.

Would it be this dress? That dress? Somehow you
 Don't care. They're timeless, never out of style.
 One of them could choose you. The surprise
 Would become you, as now sky-blue becomes you,

Carefree, timeless, never out of style.
Be it done to me, you say, *according*—
 The words become you, though you're feeling blue,
 Praying at your desk like this. Today

One thing is done, and not the other.
 Does this mean hope, or despair?
 You're praying at your desk, and it's today,
 When anything might happen. But those dresses,

Dark, unworn, locked upstairs in your mind,
 Mock your nakedness. Hope feels like despair.
 Still, anything can happen, any day
 You wear your noonday habit, and it's done.

Charity Gingerich

Little Cup of Stars

In German, the word for thirst is *durst*,
which sounds like the clearest of brooks. And *durste*,

a piece of Old English to dare, to venture, to presume. I dare
to have a big thirst, “to be allowed to be thirsty.”

The body is a yellow house, with one room for every wish;
the heart an easy guess: morningstarness pulsing

like the Schuman arias I practiced fervently
but never got to perform, except for a friend on his deathbed.

Like any good vocalist, I gulp water daily, vigilant for dryness
for any sort of losing out. I was taught that laziness = foolishness,

so that each note, each thought, each room of the body
is in need of constant cleansing. Not for what I can detect,

but for what I cannot. My thirst then a sort of bravery,
my house modeled after *kleinegroß*.

O God, if I were to shake you for a cup of stars,
how lost would I be in their richness, the milk

of my longing, their beauty, becoming this cloud-high roof of me.

Tania Runyan

Behold, He is Coming on the Clouds

Jesus fishing for men in the mackerel sky.

Jesus shooting contrails from his wounds.

Jesus swinging in the low-slung hammock of a storm.

Jesus stratus boarding.

Jesus lobbing puffs of cumulonimbus at his enemies.

Jesus gripping a cirrus by its wispy reins and swooping down
to the trees.

Jesus dissipating into fog and condensing on your glasses.

Jesus dampening your sleeve.

Jesus the smell of rain on your fingers.

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