

ISSUE 1



ADVERSUS PRESS  
ART AGAINST THE TIMES

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## Editors' Notes

So, here it is at last. Anticipated by literally dozens of you, dear readers, the inaugural issue of *Adversus Press* has arrived. My Managing Editor has asked me to write a few words here and so here a few words I will write. I have already spilled enough (digital) ink about what Poetry with a capital P really is. I think we can best use our all-too-brief time together by discussing the place of poetry in *Adversus*, and the place of *Adversus* in the world, although, perhaps, in the reverse of that order.

*Adversus Press* is a magazine of duality. The “adversus” in *Adversus Press* is the perfect passive participle of a Latin verb which means “to turn toward.” It carries two senses in which we are interested. The first is that of hostility. Indeed, it is this sense that almost everyone thinks of first, with cognates like “adverse” and “adversity” springing to mind. But the second sense is more simple: that of having been turned. The passive participle, with the verb acting on the subject, expresses the Christian life well. God turns us toward Himself. We fully embrace both senses at once, because they are intricately linked. When God turns someone toward Himself, He turns them away from everything else. Friendship with God is enmity toward the world. We are strangers and wanderers here.

Many Christians — and by extension, Christian publications — forget this. They try to make this light and passing world into a permanent home. We refuse to do that. There are idols in this world to topple, sacred groves to hew, and golden calves to beat to powder. But simple deconstruction is the work of the pagans. There is an eternity and an Eternal God towards whom to build, to work, and to write. This, then, is the two-fold purpose of poetry, in my view: to lampoon the works of Satan and to revel in the works of God.

This theme binds together all of the poetry in this issue. All of the poets in this issue have been turned toward God and away from the world. It spills out in poetry likewise turned toward God and His gifts. I hope you enjoy it.

*Jonathan Graham, Poetry Editor.*

*Jonathan Graham is a husband, father, student, activist, poet, and writer from Charleston, SC. Most recently, The American Journal of Poetry published his poem “You Grave For Me;” his poetry is also forthcoming at West Trade Review, and has placed in The Lyric’s 2017 College Poetry Contest. In what little spare time he has, he enjoys fishing on the beach or foraging for wild mushrooms in the Francis Marion National Forest.*

## Editors' Notes

Hello readers, and welcome to the inaugural issue of Adversus Press Magazine. After many months of laboring to seek out and select only the best of the work available to us, my fellow editors and I are pleased to present you with this fine collection of literature.

As the fiction editor for Adversus Press, it has been a pleasure to witness the zeal many of you have shown for writing stories that honor God. Storytelling as a tool to express the beauty of God and His creation is one of my chief passions, and I have been encouraged to see so many eager writers and readers invested in this work.

My hope for this magazine is to reawaken our culture to the depth and breadth of artistry available through faithful Christians who understand what art is because we understand from whence art comes.

For centuries, Christians have not only made good art, but have *defined* good art. Understanding that we are made in the image of God and have innate creativity as a result, Christians stand against an age of postmodernism where anything and everything can be art as long as it's 'art to *you*'. We recognize that just as there is order and objectivity to the beauty of creation, so there must be order and objectivity to the beauty of Christian art.

Thus, at Adversus Press, we unabashedly champion Art Against the Times.

As we continue to publish exceptional writing, I hope to work with many of you closely to develop strong, engaging work that will bring joy to the reader and glory to God.

*Rob Herron, Fiction Editor*

*Rob Herron is a freelance writer and student of World History with a focus on ancient mythology. He lives with his wife Madeleine (the Managing Editor of Adversus Press) in Charleston, South Carolina, where they enjoy hiking and camping, studying theology, engaging in rousing discussions about character arcs, and spending entirely too much time at their local used bookstore.*

# An Amaryllis for Christmas

LindaAnn LoSchiavo

## Part 1. During Lent

Resuscitate the wilted, raise what's close  
To death: on their lanai I'm still green  
At miracles, surrounded by a sky  
Gone cold, thin tendrils, others that curled up  
In self-protection, living through dying:  
My mother's crown-of-thorns, old hens and chicks,  
Impatiens, rosary vines, all consigned.

I'm trusted to recover favorites  
Forgotten in ruined grass blades wisped away  
With those resigned to layered loss by knives — —  
With dignity. In its own bed, blood-red,  
An amaryllis, prized, waits, hibernates.

My mother's eager to succumb to bloom.  
She's overdue for majesty, that awe.  
*O, mater nostra, fiat voluntas tua.*

## Part 2. Flashback: A Past Christmas Season near Tampa Bay

It's Safety Harbor's Gulf of Mexico  
Producing Christmastime's Cancerian  
Heat in December that confused this bulb.  
Amidst the presents and nativity,  
Its empty cradle strewn with straw, green life  
Ripped up gay mummy wrapping, and tore loose,

Unhampered by its ground like Lazarus  
Unbound. My parents, unprepared for ghosts  
Of miracles, became unnerved by sounds  
Newborn right by their crèche, the fir tree's base,  
Invisible and inexplicable  
Like faith. Or like remission. After Mass,  
They find a determined amaryllis, force  
That sleeps but cannot die, that mother took to heart.

### Part 3. During Advent

The screened lanai cured by potent sun  
Makes specimens thrive but this takes its time — —  
Determined amaryllis — — teasing us,  
As if it knows that mother needs no plant  
That grows on mortal soil. Examined, though,  
Our last time, blood has rushed, its bud has blushed  
A crimson that can only mean one thing.

I rush to mother, "Vivat!" in my heart.  
The priest has come for her confession, led  
With rosary-wrapped raised hands. "*In vitam  
Aeternum*," my lips chant along with theirs,  
Head bowed out of respect, my eyes still holding on.

*The stage plays of LindaAnn LoSchiavo are often seen off-Broadway and elsewhere. Her formal verse has been seen in Measure, Ink and Letters, Windhover, Peacock Journal, and in the chapbook Conflicted Excitement published in 2017 by Red Wolf Editions.*

# Why Johnny Still Can't Write Compelling Christian Fiction

Josiah DeGraaf

“Can’t you see you’re not making Christianity better?” the character Hank Hill asks an incompetent Christian rock performer in an episode of *King of the Hill*. “You’re just making rock n’ roll worse.”<sup>1</sup>

The same could be said for much of what is marketed today as “Christian fiction.”

In contrast to the great works Christians wrote in the past—works like *Canterbury Tales*, *Crime and Punishment*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and *The Man Who Was Thursday*—many modern Christian works tend to be rather eye-rolling. There are standard candidates to blame: preachy characters, stale dialogue, simplistic plots, and contrived conversions.

But even when the preachiness and overtness is solved, many works in the genre still feel sterile and unfulfilling. At times, it’s led me to wonder if having a specific genre for Christian fiction is a good idea.

I was talking with a fellow teacher at my school a couple months ago about why Christian writers today are so lackluster compared to the great Christian writers of times past. As we were talking, he made a point that stuck with me: the best Christian writers of the past tended to be those who were removed from their culture.

It’s that removal which is missing from modern Christian fiction.

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<sup>1</sup> "Reborn to be Wild." *King of the Hill*, written by Tony Gama-Lobo & Rebecca May, directed by Dominic Polcino, Anivision, 2003.

## Why Isolation and Exile Create Great Fiction

If you were to examine lists of the greatest Christian writers across history, Dante, Bunyan, and Dostoevsky would all be on the top of most lists.

What's interesting is when each of them wrote their great works. Dante didn't write *The Divine Comedy* until after he had been exiled from Florence. Bunyan didn't write *Pilgrim's Progress* until after he was thrown into prison for preaching the Gospel. Dostoevsky, although not abandoned physically by his culture, didn't write his greatest works until he saw modernism scraping away Russia's Christian roots and felt left behind. In some way or another, all three were removed from their respective cultures before they wrote their greatest works.

This isolation can be seen in their writings. Dante, of course, puts many of his political opponents in his depiction of Hell. But his critique in *The Divine Comedy* is not simply a political critique, but a critique of a society that has abandoned the Christian morals it used to uphold, and which now uses morals as a façade to obtain their desires. Bunyan portrays at multiple points the hostility of governments and other earthly institutions to the Gospel. And some of Dostoevsky's greatest moments come when he attacks the nihilism sweeping Russia.

These writers' removal from society helped them see their society more clearly—especially their society's flaws. It's hard to see your own culture objectively when you're immersed from it. As each writer was taken out of that immersion, they saw it with a clarified vision and they critiqued it.

That critique is what made them the authors they're known for today.

## Great Literature Critiques Its Own Culture

While Harper Lee, Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, and Geoffrey Chaucer weren't removed from their cultures, they all critiqued their cultures in different ways in their works. One of Dickens' most famous lines—"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times"—is part of a larger section that satirizes the way people in his time exaggerated matters and spoke past each other. Many of Chaucer's characters in *Canterbury Tales* satirize different social classes of the time. These writers are not alone. Many other great works of literature feature similar critiques. In large part, great literature critiques culture rather than affirms it.

Why? Because the great authors understood that anyone can praise the parts of their own culture that they like. But it's a precious few who can correctly identify and pinpoint the problems of their own culture. When that happens, however, literature actually has the opportunity to say something meaningful. After all, you never make an impact by saying things everyone already agrees with.

However, it isn't enough to critique someone *else's* culture. While this can certainly be done well at points and can certainly drive change, they aren't as effective. These critiques, in fiction, too often lack empathy and understanding for the other side. Dostoevsky critiqued Russia's nihilism effectively because he *loved* Russia, even as he mourned what Russia was turning into. This combination of love and critique *can* happen across cultures, but it's easier to apply to your own.

When an author critiques their own culture, that critique has the benefit of coming from someone who truly does *understand* and *care* about that culture succeeding. That's why it's more effective in re-orienting its readers perspectives and driving social change. This matrix of understanding, care, and critique forms the core of the great works of the Western canon.

## The Problem with Christian Fiction

Many works of Christian fiction contain critiques of the general culture at large. But the problem is that broader American culture generally *isn't* the culture of the author. The culture of the author tends to be some breed of *Christian* culture, which is often distinct from the culture of society-at-large.

As a result, many works of Christian fiction feel simplistic because they're self-congratulatory. They're not trying to help their target audiences think about complex questions of life and question the status quo. They're focused on reinforcing previously held beliefs, whether by congratulating ourselves on our superior "intellect" in *God's Not Dead* or reminding the world how terrible it would be without Christians in *Left Behind*.

It's storytelling that's naïve at best, and uncharitable at worse towards the other side. Furthermore, it's storytelling that doesn't equip Christian readers to better understand the world and act appropriately in it.

Why do Christian stories often fail then? They fail because of our arrogance. We love to try and make our culture uncomfortable with their sins. But we shirk from becoming uncomfortable with *our* sins. We don't want to tell stories dealing frankly with hypocrisy within the Church, a lack of compassion for unbelievers, or our tendencies to box God into only certain portions of our lives.

We're unwilling to point out the problems in our own culture and in our own churches. As a result, we miss the bar for greatness.

## Writing Great Christian Fiction

What might a return to great Christian fiction look like then? It looks like writing stories *for* Christians that reveal actual problems in Christian's lives and show what it looks like to act more like Christ.

Maybe it looks like something like *Believe Me*, a film which satirizes much of American evangelicalism with a narrative about four unbelievers who create a fake missions organization to fleece money from Christians. Or perhaps it looks something like *Silence*, a book which examines what it means to endure persecution when God appears to be uncaring and silent. It looks like stories that explore the difficult questions Christians wrestle with and reveal problems in Christian culture for what they are: problems we need to fix.

You don't need to be physically isolated from a culture to write great fiction. But you do need to see its flaws fairly. Christian storytellers have an opportunity to tell meaningful stories if we drop our rose-tinted glasses toward our own culture and take a long, hard look at what it looks like to truly live like Christ.

All it takes is some good old-fashioned humility

*Josiah DeGraaf is a high school English teacher and literature nerd who fell in love with stories when he was young and hasn't fallen out of love ever since. He currently serves as the editor-in-chief of Kingdom Pen and writes fantasy short stories at his website. Someday, Josiah hopes to write fantasy novels with worlds as imaginative as Brandon Sanderson's, characters as complex as Orson Scott Card's, character arcs as dynamic as Jane Austen's, and themes as deep as Fyodor Dostoevsky's.*

# **Rage, Rage Against the Light**

*David Benning*

They go not quiet into that good night,  
Their old age burns and churns at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the coming gleam of Light.

Earth's sages speak and claim unconquered might  
And wax poetic at their fate,  
Their heads unbowed at Horrors great,  
Yet rage, rage against the coming end of Night.

Good folks, though that be subjective blight,  
Arrange their deeds by shades of gray,  
Yet curse what gods there be at Day  
And slip like quarry-slaves away,  
And rage, rage against the coming Light.

The wild men then and unschooled sprites  
Who laughed and sang at endless dark,  
Reviled the talk of coming Spark,  
Now shudder at the Light so stark,  
And rage, rage against the end of Night.

While solemn men and healthy youth alike  
All quake and writhe and curse and strike  
And call to rocks and rills,  
To mountains, stones and hills,  
“O Blind our eyes and hide our night  
From Him who comes in endless Light.”  
Then rage, rage against His coming Might.

But come He must and all that's just  
Will thrill and trill at ending Night,  
Then on that day, bid tears away,  
Step gently in His Light!

*David Benning lives in California with his wife. Early in his life he fell in love with language and has been under the spell, as it were, of poems and rhymes and cleverly nuanced wordings. His early influences included John Donne, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and Caedmon, as well as the hills of West Virginia with all their resplendent colors and textures. Realizing, however, that he would be very hard pressed to find a job employing Old English skills, he majored in biochemistry and computer science but earned a minor in pre-Shakespearean literature as well. He is a musician at his church and is active in writing and arranging music for choir and congregational settings.*

# Ode to Spring

*Ann Christine Tabaka*

From my hands  
The seeds scatter forth  
I dream of spring  
When the earth gives birth

The fissures swallow  
With hungry lust  
Each tiny seed  
Beneath its crust

Soon came the rains  
The seeds to nourish  
The barren ground  
Soon to flourish

*Ann Christine Tabaka lives in Delaware. She is a published poet and artist. She loves gardening and cooking. Chris lives with her husband and two cats. Her most recent credits are The Paragon Journal, The Literary Hatchet, Metaworker, Raven Cage Ezine, RavensPerch, Anapest Journal, Mused, Indiana Voice Journal, Halcyon Days Magazine, The Society of Classical Poets, and BSU's Celestial Musings Anthology.*

# The Wold

*Joshua Hugo*

The light died without warning. Darkness smothered Mara, binding her joints, blocking her nose. She crouched with her arms guarding her face and forced herself to inhale, exhale. She counted. One, two... She knew no number higher than one hundred, so when she reached it she started over again.

The darkness filled with murmurs, some fearful, some confident.

“This shouldn’t happen! The light is supposed to fade slowly!”

“The Committee must know what’s going on. They’ll fix it.”

“Sight is a weakness. This doesn’t bother me.”

Mara counted one hundred again, then again. How many hundreds now? Around her, the murmurs slowly become whimpers.

The light returned as suddenly it had gone, unapologetic for its absence. For a few moments everyone stood still and looked at each other, as if for reassurance that the light had, in fact, returned. Then traffic began to ooze through the tunnel again. Hundreds of bodies pressed and slid against each other, and against the smooth stone walls.

Mara moved with the press of bodies until she reached a junction of two tunnels, where a naked bulb hung from the ceiling. She sat down under the bulb, letting its light flow over her head and shoulders, into her eyes. She was an obstruction, but no one told her to move. The others hugged the walls, trying not to look straight at her, trying not to let her skin touch theirs.

Soon Mara was alone. Everyone else had gone to their cells in Sleeping. She was tempted to stay there in the junction, alone in the light, but she would be beaten if she were not in her cell by lights-off, and, much worse, she would lose a meal.

Director Aly had a thing called a “clock” that tracked the passage of time. Mara had seen it once. It had seemed useless then, a heavy box that did nothing but move a tiny mark across its own surface. But now Mara desperately wanted a clock. A clock could tell her how long she could safely linger, there in the light.

Mara ran, hunched in the low stone tunnels, passing through long stretches of gloom and small patches of harsh illumination. Her cell was not in Sleeping with the others, but alone at the end of a disused shaft. As it came into view, the lights began to dim, not dying as in the blackout, but turning down slowly, controlled, on schedule.

An orderly was waiting for her. She did not speak to him, but hurried past to climb into her cell. He held up his lantern and peered at her through the cell's entrance hole.

“I should mark you absent,” he said, “but I’m doing the punishments tomorrow, and I don't want to have to touch you.”

“Thank you, sir,” she answered.

He snorted. He made a mark on his slate and waddled away, a squashed, stump-legged silhouette framed by the lantern light. Mara closed her eyes as he turned the corner, so that she would not see the light disappear.

Mara had chiseled two tiny alcoves into the stone above her cell's entrance. She removed the rag that was her only clothing and placed a corner of it into each alcove, then set stones on top of the corners, making a curtain. This was a habit she had started when her cell had been in Sleeping. It was not necessary now—no one saw her here—but it gave her a sense of ownership. The curtain made the cell hers.

Mara lay on her back. She put her feet on the ceiling and a hand on each wall. She pressed, enjoying the strength in her limbs. Her limbs were the parts of her body that embarrassed her least. They were ugly, but they were useful. Mara was strong. She was the strongest person in the

world.

Mara had only two dreams; all others were variations of the two. In the first dream, darkness entombed and suffocated her, and she woke up crying with terror. She hated this dream because it made her afraid of the dark, and the dark was where she had to live. In the second dream, she was in a bright place with no walls or ceiling, and she woke up overwhelmed by an intense longing that she did not understand. This dream was exhilarating, but it made the waking world seem small, dim, and lifeless, so she hated it too.

*There was a great light above her, infinitely high, so enormous and bright that it lit the whole world all at once. There was green beneath her, so intense that she could feel it in her eyes. The green caressed her feet as she walked, and walked, and walked, never turning, never turning. She looked up and beheld a color for which she had no name.*

She woke in blackness. Her feet pressed against the hard stone of her cell. She wept.

\* \* \*

Mara was already awake when the alarm bell clanged. The lights came on, isolated points, showing the shapes of the tunnels more by specularity than illumination. Mara pulled her rag down and knotted it around her hips. She picked up her toilet pot and headed toward Recycling. The tunnels were always congested near the center of the world, but always orderly. But now there was a strange tension in the throng that made its members clumsy. People glanced at each other, their eyes to the sides instead of forward. The air was dense with whispers. Mara tried to listen, but all of the whispers near enough to hear clearly were complaints about her about her—her deformity, her noise, her stink. She could hear nothing useful.

Like all large rooms, Recycling had an irregular, organic shape, with lumpy walls and a

ceiling covered in the broken stumps of stalactites. It was dominated by the Recycler, an inscrutable mass of tanks and pipes that took up more than half the room's volume. The room was illuminated by a cluster of bulbs on a pole in its center. These cast sharp shadows that gave the Recycler a knotted, intestinal look.

Mara knew that all waste must be put into the Recycler, and that something bad would happen if this was not done. She also knew that the machine was somehow involved in the creation of water and fertilizer. She knew nothing of it beyond this, and she was not curious.

People queued in the empty half of the room—the half not filled by the Recycler—forming a line that doubled back on itself a dozen times. When each person's turn came, he or she ascended a short metal platform and dumped their toilet pot into a chute. At the chute's bottom, a pair of toothed rollers ground up whatever was solid and let liquid pass through into the machine. Some of the people brought corpses as well. For each corpse, an orderly would record the name of the person who had died, and then the body would be tossed down the chute with the other waste.

Mara did not join the queue. She stood in the darkest part of the room and waited to go last. This was partially because no one would willingly stand next to her, but it was also because it allowed her to watch and listen furtively. Listening carefully to other people's conversations was almost like having friends. She spotted Mur and Bel, a pair of old women whose humorous observations always amused her. She turned an ear toward them, expectant.

They held hands, as usual, but their grip seemed tight, as if seeking support rather than expressing affection. "Who did you hear it from?" "Lond, but everyone's saying it." "The Director would tell us if it were true, wouldn't she?"

A trio of eunuchs came into earshot: "Could the blackout have been a sign that this would happen?" "No, there've been blackouts before." "Strange coincidence, though."

Curiosity burned in Mara. She had assumed that the blackout was the cause of the restless mood, but if it was not, then what was? What news had her stigmatization kept her from hearing? She felt an overwhelming urge to ask someone, but she must not. If she asked, it might start a fight, and then she would learn nothing.

The queue dwindled until only Mara was left. She hurried forward and dumped her pot into the Recycler. The orderly marked her on his slate. “Thank you, sir,” she said.

Eating was the largest and brightest place in the world. Ten bulbs hung from the ceiling in a line down the long axis of the oblong room, casting light nearly to its edges. Several metal tables occupied the center. The tables’ legs had been cut short sometime in the unremembered past. The people around them sat on the floor.

Mara skirted Eating, avoiding the light for as long as possible. But the food pot was directly under a bulb, and there was no way to reach it without exposing herself.

She came into the light. She took two stone bowls from a stack on the floor and held them out to be filled.

Two bowls. Two, when every other person in the world took one. Two bowls, meaning that because she lived some other person could not. Her deformities—her towering height, her huge eyes, the longness of her neck and limbs—these could have been forgiven. Her appetite could not. There had not been a murderer in the world for many shifts, but Mara was regarded almost as if she were one.

As the cook spooned food into her bowls, she wondered again why the Committee made this exception for her. Why didn't they let her starve, or kill her outright? It had been many shifts since Mara had last pondered this question, but the curiosity that had been awakened in her was indiscriminate.

Her labor was valuable, she knew—she could lift nearly twice as much as the next-strongest

person—but she doubted that it was more valuable than the labor of two people. The official explanation was simply that the Committee was obligated to feed everyone, including Mara, but the Committee routinely killed malformed infants, and she did not believe that they would have spared her merely because her deformities were not evident at birth.

“Thank you, sir,” she said to the cook. She looked for a place to sit. Normally, she would simply sit as far from anyone else as possible, but right now she wanted to listen. The most animated conversations were at the tables, but she would be too conspicuous if she tried to sit near them. She spotted a pair of eunuchs talking near the tunnel to Generating. She moved as close to them as she dared, and sat down.

“Rebellion, maybe?” one was saying. “Maybe he wants to replace Aly as Director?”

“Betraying us all wouldn't help him become Director. I think he's just crazy.”

“That's a terrible thought! If Tev is crazy, then half the world could have craziness in them.”

The second eunuch tipped his bowl back and slurped the last of his food. “Stay here,” he said. “I'm going to go see if Rast has heard anything.” He stood and walked off, toward the tables.

To Mara's astonishment, the other eunuch turned and spoke to her: “Hey, who are you? I'm Hass. Have you heard anything new?” He was blind, she realized, his eyes shriveled and gray at the bottoms of their sockets. A thrill went through her. What luck!

“I'm Kana,” Mara said, trying to keep the excitement out of her voice. She spoke slowly, choosing words that she hoped would prompt Hass to tell what he knew without revealing her own ignorance. “I heard that maybe Tev is doing what he's doing because of the blackout last shift?”

“That's stupid,” Hass said. “Why would Tev refuse to mate because of a blackout?”

“Not because of it, maybe, but maybe the blackout was a sign that it was going to happen?”

Hass moved closer to Mara, walking on his knuckles. He turned his ear toward her. He had never heard her speak before and did not know her voice, but the noise of her breathing was unique, recognizable. She tried to draw shallower breaths, but it was too late.

“Mara?” He reached out. His hand touched her breast, grotesquely swollen, protrusive, the size of a fist. “Mara!” He recoiled in revulsion. He retreated, cursing.

He had forgotten his bowl. There was still food in it. Mara felt guilty, but there was nothing she could do except leave it there and hope he found it again.

Mara headed toward Tilling. Tilling was where her strength was useful, so she was usually eager to get there. But now she moved slowly, thinking.

Tev had refused to mate? “Father Tev,” the most successful breeder in the history of Progeny? Tev, who had sired more than one hundred of the world's people? It was unthinkable: it was a breeder’s duty to mate, his job, his purpose. To refuse was a betrayal of the world, and a disavowal of his own self.

Tev's children were consistently perfect: thin, short-limbed, toothless, eating little and sleeping much. Many of them were blind. If Tev had stopped mating, that would be a great loss for Progeny, but worse was the possibility that Hass had mentioned: if Tev were insane, what of his children?

Mara was so engrossed in her thoughts that she did not notice Tev himself standing in the middle of Tilling. The gasps of others drew her attention to the stooped, bald man standing on a heap of crushed rock. People gathered around him. A frantic whispering built up. The orderlies muttered and fidgeted with their knives, but they did not know what to do.

When the crowd had stopped growing, Tev spoke: “We all crave light. Even those who cannot see love to feel light on their skin. But we hope that our children will be blind. How can this be?”

He said no more. He walked out of Tilling, the crowd parting to let him pass.

The moment he was gone, everyone began shouting at once. Some people wanted to follow Tev down the tunnel. Some wanted to work as usual. Others were already arguing over what the riddle meant. One woman fainted. The orderlies shouted for calm, but no one listened until Director Aly appeared. She stamped her booted feet until there was silence, then she commanded the orderlies to kill anyone who did not work as usual. Everyone knew that the threat was good.

Mara and the other diggers chiseled at the wall with scraps of metal. The rock they dislodged was hauled to the center of the room, where beaters pulverized it by smashing the pieces together. By iterations, the rock became powder. The powder was taken to Growing, where it was mixed with fertilizer from the Recycler to make soil. In this soil was grown the rubbery fungus which was the world's only food.

\* \* \*

Tev visited each of the Departments that shift. In each he spoke a different riddle. The shifts that followed were unlike anything in Mara's experience. No one talked of anything except Tev—rival interpretations of his behavior swirling, colliding, and grating against each other—and they talked of him constantly, even when they were supposed to be sleeping, even when they were supposed to be working.

Director Aly repeated her threats. The orderlies did eventually kill three people, and two more died in careless accidents. But even the sight of corpses going into the Recycler did little to suppress the whispering.

Adding to the mystery was the fact that Tev did not reappear after his visits to the

Departments. No one had seen him, not even the other breeders. Was he in the Committee's Private Rooms? There was nowhere else he could be, unless he had gone into the Recycler. But if he was in the Private Rooms, why was the Committee hiding him? What did they not want the people to know?

After four shifts of this disorder, a meeting was called. Lights-off was delayed, and everyone was told to gather in Eating after work was finished.

All but one of the bulbs in Eating had been dimmed, and a table had been moved directly under it. Director Aly stood on the table, singular in the circle of light. She was regal in boots and a garment that covered her from the neck all the way down to the knees. She stamped her feet for silence, then spoke.

“Throughout history,” she said, “we have risen to many challenges. When the old food ran out, our ancestors did not sit idly and let themselves starve. They invented a new way of growing food, and they survived. When the old airmakers failed, our ancestors did not let themselves suffocate. They started the population quota, and survived. When the old soil ran out, they created the Tilling Department, and survived.

“Today, we are not merely surviving. We are preparing for the future. We know that one day there will be no more fuel for the Generator, and then there will be no more light. Do we simply wait for that to happen? No! We are breeding people who do not need light, who will be at home in the future world. Our descendants will think back on us with gratitude for the work we are doing. Diggers, tinkers, menders, orderlies, breeders—all of us! We are ensuring a good life for those who come after.”

The crowd murmured assent. She paused to let it.

“You know how important our work is,” Aly continued, “and yet you have allowed it to be disrupted. Workers have died. Food production has slowed. Air has been wasted. Why have you

allowed this to happen? To hear rumors? To tell stories? It grieves me that you have allowed foolish words to weaken us. But they will weaken us no more. Here and now, I will confront all of the rumors and lay them to rest.”

Aly gestured to mouth of a nearby tunnel. A pair of orderlies emerged from it, leading Tev by a chain. His face was swollen and discolored. Bruises covered his limbs. A whimper ran through the crowd, growing into a moan. Aly stamped her feet, again and again until order was restored.

“I know that it is horrible to see,” she said, “but it was necessary. I love Father Tev, as we all do, and because I love him, I tried everything I could to make him see reason, to convince him to take back his foolishness and end the trouble it has caused. Regrettably, he refuses. But his folly must be confronted nonetheless.”

Aly looked down on Tev and commanded, “Tell us why you have refused to mate. Tell us plainly, without riddles.”

Tev stood obediently before the table and spoke, his voice rich after Aly's shrill. “The reason I have stopped mating and the reason I spoke to you four shifts ago is this: I have come to believe that the world is not our home. There is a different world, and we belong in that world, not this one.”

Mara breathed in and forgot to breathe out. For a moment the room was completely silent.

“Tell us why you believe this,” Aly commanded.

“Since childhood,” Tev answered, “I have noticed things that seem inconsistent, like the world is contradicting itself. These things have always troubled me, but I said nothing, because I believed that my thoughts were unimportant. But when I saw the great horror that the blackout caused, it made me reconsider how important these thoughts might be.”

“Explain your thoughts,” Aly commanded. “Tell us what you noticed.”

“I noticed that we crave more light than exists in the world. Even in the brightest rooms,

none of us ever has enough. If we belong in this world, why do we want things that it does not provide? Progeny in trying to breed people without eyes. Why is that necessary? If this world is our home, then why do we need to change ourselves in order to live in it?

“I noticed that the world contains things which cannot be made in the world. Our ancestors ate the old food. When it ran out, no more could be made. The Generator is fueled by hotstones. Our ancestors had many hotstones. We have few, because we cannot make more. The table our Director stands on is metal. We cannot make more metal. If these things cannot be made, where did they come from?”

“I noticed that a stone arch will collapse if too much weight is placed over it, but our tunnels do not collapse. If the stone above us goes up forever, then its weight must be infinite. Why doesn't this weight collapse our tunnels?”

“I noticed that many of us have the same dream. We dream of a Great Light, of rich colors, of a place with no ceiling or walls. An Open Place. People who have had this dream all wish that they could really go there, that they could stay in the dream. How can we all want the same thing if it does not exist? If it does not exist, how can we all know about it?”

“The answer, I believe, is that the Open Place is real. We crave light because we belong under the great light. The things that cannot be made here were made there. Our tunnels do not collapse because the Open Place, not endless rock, is up above us. And we all dream of the Open Place because the first ancestors came from there, and our blood remembers it even if our minds do not. I believe that the Open Place is real. I believe that we can reach it.”

Finished, Tev bowed his head.

“You have heard him,” Aly said. “Now hear me! Tev's idea is enticing. Even I was tempted to believe in it at first. But it is foolishness.”

“It is true that we crave more light than the world provides, but is that evidence of a ‘great

light' somewhere? Certainly not! In the past there were more bulbs to make light, and more fuel for the Generator. The past was brighter, so of course our ancestors were accustomed to more light. The reason the light does not satisfy us now is because we have not adapted to the changing world. Our ancestors did not start Progeny soon enough. If they had, then we would not crave light now. This is a reason to increase our commitment to Progeny, to make sure that our descendants are adapted so that they do not suffer as we do.

“It is true that the world contains things which we cannot make, but why should that surprise us? When we break a stone, we cannot recreate it. Does that mean that stones are from a magical otherworld? The old food, the hotstones, these things are simply a part of the world, like the rock itself. They did not come from anywhere. They simply are.

“Our tunnels do not collapse, no, but what does that prove? Tev assumes that this ‘open place’ is above us, but we might just as well assume that it is an unknown type of rock, or that gravity stops at a certain height, or that there is nothing at all. We simply do not know, and ignorance proves nothing.

“As for dreams, Tev is partially correct. Your blood does remember something, but it is not an ‘open place.’ It is this.” Aly reached into her garment and drew out a shard of stone. She held it up so that it caught the light.

Mara gasped. The stone was the color from her dream.

The crowd began to creep forward, mouths gaping, eyes wide to receive this beauty. The orderlies brandished their knives, keeping the people back.

“This is the color called ‘blue,’” Aly said. “The Directors before me stored a number of blue objects in the Private Rooms, to keep them safe for when they were needed. They are needed now. From this shift on, an orderly will bring a blue object into Sleeping before lights-off. Anyone who wishes to see blue may look and be satisfied.”

The crowd cheered.

“Now let this be the end of foolish talk and idle fantasies,” Aly commanded “We have work to do.”

\* \* \*

“It's called a ‘chair,’” Aly said. “Do you like it?”

“Yes,” Mara answered. “It’s...” She pressed her back against it, relishing its caress. She had no words to express such pleasure.

“You could sit in chairs often. Would you like that?”

Mara nodded. She would be glad to even see a chair often, its form was so pleasing. Director Aly sat in a second chair, behind something she had call a “desk.” There were two bulbs in the room, one above the desk, the other illuminating a shelf of—Mara had no words for them—a shelf of beautiful things.

“I know you don’t get to see the blue things when they are brought into Sleeping,” Aly said. “But you could come here to look at them instead. Would you like that?”

Mara nodded, but it was not true. She did not want to see the blue things, not now, not ever.

“But before you can come back here,” Aly said, “there is something I need you to do.”

“You need me to kill Tev,” Mara said.

Aly’s widened, then narrowed. ”Why would you think that?” she asked.

“It just makes sense,” Mara said. “People think Tev is crazy, but they still love him. They were angry with you for beating him. They’ll be angry with whoever kills him, even though they know it has to be done. So it makes sense for me do it. Everyone already hates me. They can be angry with me, and nothing is lost.”

“You thought of that yourself?”

“I think about things in my cell. I don't have anyone to talk to.”

“I am sorry, Mara, about the way things are for you,” Aly said. “I love you. I love all of my people. But I can't treat everyone the same. Everyone has their own purpose, their own destiny. You have a destiny, Mara. You are necessary.”

“Thank you, sir.”

Three Committeemen led Mara down a brightly lit tunnel to a room with a metal door. Inside the room Tev lay on the floor, bound hand and foot. They pushed Mara into the room, and one of them pressed a knife into her hand.

“I want to be alone with him,” Mara said. The Committeemen glanced at each other, uncertain. “This is a shameful thing,” she pleaded. “I don't want anyone to see me do it.”

One of the Committeemen laughed, “You, Mara, ashamed?” But they closed the door, and she was alone with Tev.

The Committee had made further efforts to convince Tev to recant: blood crusted around dozens of shallow cuts, and his whole body was bruised. Mara could see the outlines of broken ribs under his skin.

She knelt beside him, knife in hand.

“Be quick,” he whispered.

Mara spoke: “I believe you. I believe in the Open Place. Aly thinks that her blue things prove it isn't real, but they don't. They prove that it is. We don't dream about the color because the color is special; the color is special because of the place we dream about.”

Tev met her eyes. He smiled. She smiled back.

She was quick.

\* \* \*

The next shift, Mara began humming to herself. There was no specific rule forbidding what she was going to do, but she knew that she would be stopped if anyone found out. So she made a habit of humming simple songs and tapping to their rhythm during lights-on. Then if anyone came near her cell during lights-off, they would not recognize the sounds they heard as digging.

It was easy to smuggle digging tools into her cell, easy too to smuggle out the bits of broken stone, folded in her rag. She dug straight up; no one could have seen her tunnel unless they crawled fully into her cell with a lantern, and no one would ever do that.

She scraped away a finger-width of rock each shift. The tunnel grew taller. Soon she was worming her whole body up into it, feet and knees braced against opposite walls, hands working in the dark overhead.

She did not think about destiny. She did not think about the thickness of the rock above her. She did not wonder how others would judge her, should her tunnel fail or succeed. She thought simply that she was moving toward the Open Place. If she was moving toward it—if she was going there—then, in her heart, it was her home.

*Joshua Hugo lives in Texas with his wife, two daughters, one son, and a rabbit named Wilfred. He will look bemused if you mention a sports team, pleased if you mention minarchism, curious if you mention steampunk, and offended if you insinuate that video games are not art. He hopes to be a movie director when he grows up.*

# Faeries

*Joffre Swait*

We waited a long time for him to show.  
I wished that I had learned to tell him no.

We're hunting woodsy creatures through the snow,  
We've waited a long time for them to show.

We have not yet begun to fight our foe,  
He shouted from the very backest row.

The woodsy creatures hunt us to and fro.  
I wish that I had learned to tell them no.

*Joffre Swait is very tall, pretty dark, and kind of handsome. He lives in the upcountry of South Carolina with his wife and five children, in a modest house with a beautiful garden. He makes his living teaching Spanish, Portuguese, and English as a second language. He is more ambivalent about the Norman invasion than Tolkien was. Joffre is the author of "Well Met: Poems of Companionship," (Jovial Press, Nov. 2017) and co-author of "Christian Pipe Smoking: An Introduction to Holy Incense." Joffre can be found on social media as Joffre the Giant.*

## John 8:36

*Lisa Cooper*

Though in transgression, God won't leave me be,  
though lost, defeated, and in sin I died;  
The Love of God comes near to set me free.

From in the pew, my sins shown plain to me,  
My soul—tormented—tries to run and hide;  
Though in transgression, God won't let me be

left picking, eating fruit from that damned tree,  
left to my own devices, tricks, and lies.  
The Love of God comes near to set me free.

Though bleeding, pleading, down on bended knee;  
The Law of God demands I pay a price—  
though in transgression, God won't leave me be.

God became flesh, the God-man, one in three,  
to ransom the whole earth of every vice.  
The Love of God came here and set us free!

Now given to us, His body by decree;  
His blood, forgiveness, more than any prize.  
Though in transgression, God won't leave us be;  
The Word of God came near and set us free.

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