

# IRREANTUM

## 17.2 — Hope & Healing

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Note that this ebook version of Irreantum does not include every work included in 17.2. Specifically, missing two essays, "[Conversations with Jen](#)" by Stephanie Huang Porter and "[The Other Side of the Clouds](#)" by M. Misra, which had visual elements difficult to recreate in ebook form. Also missing are the video "[Be Still My Land](#)" by Andi Pitcher Davis, and the original Spanish versions of the works by [Teresa Rosa Coustés de Ciccio](#) and [Mario R. Montani](#), translated here by Gabriel González.

After enjoying this collection, please return to [Hope & Healing](#) to complete your experience!

## New Every Day

With each morning's sunrise, a gift:  
a foot of fresh fallen snow,  
untrodden and still. Once again,

we willingly kneel onto the  
merciful blanket and carve  
promises with our frozen fingers.

**Matthew J. Andrews** is a private investigator and writer who lives in Modesto, California. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *Orange Blossom Review*, *Funicular Magazine*, *Red Rock Review*, *Sojourners*, *Amethyst Review*, *Kissing Dynamite*, and *Deep Wild Journal*, among others. He can be contacted at [matthewjandrews.com](http://matthewjandrews.com).

## Locust Swarm

I had been told time and again  
That locusts were mean insects.  
But I hardly could believe it  
Of such innocuous, lonely bugs.

These hardened, short-horned grasshoppers  
With their orange, angular legs  
Seem to stay always in their place  
And avoid the world of humans.

They rarely trespass into town,  
Except for a lost one or two.  
They prefer the vast countryside  
Where planted fields can be devoured.

There was that summer afternoon  
When we were in the fields out back  
Sitting in the willow's cool shade  
And sipping on some mate tea.

My sister and her three children  
Jumped to their feet in a panic  
When they heard a loud hum and buzz  
Coming from somewhere in the west.

Their fearful gaze they lifted up  
Toward the boundless blue above.  
My eyes too followed heavenward  
As I heard the frightful humming.

A thunderous force lurked our way  
Casting a veil against the sky.  
In a bout of fright, my sister  
Prayed frenziedly to God our Lord.

A gregarious swarm of locust  
Drove rapidly toward our plots  
Painting the whole of the sky black.  
How helpless and anguished we felt!

My sister and her three children  
Continued to look heavenward.  
They looked beyond the locust cloud  
and begged for the Eternal's help.

They plead asking that this dark sea  
Of millions of hungry locusts  
Would just pass over their humble fields  
And head east to the yellow beach.

And as the humming grew louder  
We saw not ten meters from us  
The thick, black mist of winged insects  
Pass us by, heading somewhere else.

So it was, in this simple way,  
Through devotion and heart-felt prayer  
That the swarm of frenzied locusts  
Passed us by heading somewhere else.

In our fields they did not linger;  
Perhaps their bellies had been filled  
By feasting on other wheat fields  
As they cast their trail of bare stalks.

We bowed in prayer to thank the Lord  
For having heard our frantic cries.  
The locusts had seen our wheat fields  
But chose instead to go on by.

*translated by Gabriel González*

**Teresa Rosa Coustés de Ciccio** was an Argentine poet born in 1934. She was a member of the Buenos Aires Province Association of Writers as well as the Argentine Association of Writers. She joined The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as an adult during the 1980s. Around that time she published a poetry collection titled *Recopliando recuerdos* (*Compiling Memories*) and two decades later she published her

second collection, *Memorias en verso (Memories in Verse)*, both of which bring together personal experiences told through poetry. She passed away in 2018, at the age of 84.

## Good Shepherd Church

*There's a Savior that I've never seen  
I want to thank Him for all He's done for me  
Oh but sometimes, I just want to go home*

It's a nice message, Cassandra thought. And the song isn't terrible. A little kitsch, she decided, in that particular, Christian soft-rock sort of way. And very different from what she was used to. Acoustic guitars weren't so bad, but drum sets still seemed off. This drummer would have clashed horribly with the warbled, four-part harmonies she knew so well, as with the hulking, out-of-tune pipe organ at the evensong she'd been to a week ago. She tried to give the music a chance. After weeks of fruitless searching, her hopes for the meeting were high, but her expectations could not have been lower.

*For the streets are pure as crystal  
That my feet are longing to walk on  
Oh but sometimes, I just want to go home*

Cassandra's gaze wandered across the fluorescent-lit room. A few people had their hands in the air. One older woman was smiling and weeping in the row behind. She had seen faces like that at church before. To be honest, she'd made that face a few times herself. Once at her brother's wedding reception. Maybe at a baptism. Usually while listening to hymns. But today, in this strange little room with outsized speakers, surrounded by strangers rocking gently back and forth? She felt nothing. She wanted to. She knew that others around her felt it. But not her. Not here.

*Home has never looked so good to me  
Fear is gone, spirits there are free  
When I find I'm almost falling, I see tomorrow  
And it keeps me going; there's no turning back  
I just got to make it home*

As the song ended, she noticed Helen discreetly scrutinizing her expression from the seat beside her. Cassandra forced a smile. She wanted Helen to feel she was giving the new church a fair shot. Her best, her oldest friend could never fully understand what she was going through, but Helen had made such an effort to be supportive, week after week. Cassandra dreaded letting her down again.

"Thank you for that beautiful song," the pastor said, his dry, high-pitched voice booming over the speaker system. "And thank you for your devotion." He was a tall, large man, late thirties, with curly red hair and a smile that seemed too big for his face, which was momentarily fortunate, as most of his head was buried by a massive headset

microphone, like some Nineties pop star on tour. He wore dark-rimmed glasses on the end of his wide nose and a pale blue shirt with rolled-up sleeves. A worn Bible perched proudly in his left hand, an open water bottle in his right. As he cleared his throat, Cassandra sat forward in her chair resolutely, determined to give the sermon a fair shot to win her over.

“When God became a man in the form of our Lord Jesus,” he started, his bouncy, stop-and-go cadence typical of many of the sermons Cassandra had heard over the past six weeks, “he was alone so much of the time. As a matter of fact, some even think he was homeless.” Cassandra raised her eyebrows. Maybe, just maybe, there was something here.

The red-haired pastor continued, “He told his followers that *Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head*. His hometown drove him away. His followers oftentimes abandoned him. His own family didn’t really understand who he was. And the people he came to save kept rejecting him and trying to murder him.”

Cassandra leaned forward, digging her elbows into her knees, wondering where this was going. Helen, meanwhile, had already extracted her study journal from her purse and was religiously taking notes.

“Now sometimes, Jesus took comfort in nature, something I think we all like to do as well,” the pastor went on. “And sometimes, Jesus got comfort from angels. And I do believe that there are angels watching over all of us.” A shout of AMEN went up from the crowd. “But one thing people forget about Jesus is how often he went to his friends for comfort. Yes, even Jesus had friends, little flock. In the book of John, 15th chapter, 14th verse, we read...”

Despite her best efforts, Cassandra didn’t catch most of what was said after that. It was something about trying to be friends with Jesus. Or being a good friend to others, like Jesus. It must have meant something to those around her, who supplied occasional, hearty AMENs, but this felt awkward. Too foreign. Another verse, unbidden, kept crossing her mind, though the pastor never said it: *I will call you friends, for you are my friends, and ye shall have an inheritance with me*. That last line stung. She wanted it to be true. Or at least she thought she did.

The pastor eventually finished, and the non-denominational crowd of forty or so prayed together and shared another song, during which the red-haired man’s eyes lingered on the two newcomers. Cassandra knew what that meant.

“Thanks for coming with me,” she whispered the moment the meeting ended, hastily standing, picking up her purse, and turning toward the exit.



"Of course!" Helen responded, getting to her feet. "What did you think?"

"Umm..." Cassandra started, but she didn't have time to finish, as a newly familiar voice began calling out to them.

"Sisters," it said. "Welcome to our little flock."

Cassandra had hoped to avoid this. She and Helen turned to see the pastor shuffling up gregariously behind them. She could almost taste his barely restrained enthusiasm – and she could definitely smell his perspiration.

"Hi!" Helen responded brightly. "That talk was really good, Reverend."

"Pastor, actually," he responded at once, his smile unshaken. "But you can just call me Troy. And thank you. I'm glad it was helpful."

"Oh, yeah," Helen continued. "I especially liked the part about David and Jonathan. I love that story. It's so important to have close friendships."

Troy's smile grew somehow wider. "Thank you for saying that. I'm always nervous about giving Old Testament-heavy sermons; it puts some people on edge."

"But some of the best scriptures are in the Old Testament!" Helen protested. "*Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.* It's my favorite scripture!"

She was showing off; all those hours of Scripture Mastery practice had not been wasted on her. But Cassandra didn't mind. Helen was the best Mormon she knew. She had been ever since they were in Primary together. She had always done everything she was ever supposed to: dragged Cassandra to early-morning seminary, served a mission in Paris, majored in Family and Consumer Sciences at BYU, got engaged to a General Authority's grandson at the age of 24, and still found time to serve as her ward's Relief Society President. But she never judged anyone. Not for anything. She was always there with a hug and a pizza and a funny YouTube clip anytime you needed a friend. No questions asked. Exactly the sort of friend you could ask to try out new churches with. Cassandra was going to miss that once Helen got married. Then things would get weird.

Pastor Troy raised an eyebrow and scrutinized the women with increased interest, his eyes lingering on Helen's left ring finger. "You know your Bible," he said (was that admiration? or just a hint of jealousy?). "Maybe you should be giving sermons instead of me." He laughed, then continued, "I hope you're planning to meet with us more often."

"Cassandra might," Helen blurted out, before Cassandra could stop her. "She's looking for a new place to go to church."

Troy's eyes passed over Cassandra a second time, sizing her up. "Hi, Cassandra. We're pleased to have you here with us. What brings you on your spiritual journey?"

"Oh, you know," Cassandra stalled. She never knew just how much to let on. She'd browsed Good Shepherd Church's website, and it seemed decent enough, but you could never be too sure. Especially after that uninspiring sermon. "Just the usual. Want to feel closer to God. Want to do some good in the world. Want to have a faith community again."

"Again?" Troy asked. "So you had one before? A community, I mean?"

"I thought I did."

"What happened?"

"It's a long story."

The pastor stared. He sensed, Cassandra thought, what the problem had been, but he also seemed to realize that she wouldn't disclose just yet. Instead, he said, "Well, I'm sure you'll always find friends here. At least, if people listened to today's sermon." He laughed again. "Can I ask what church you attended before?"

Cassandra hesitated. "Recently, I've been a lot of places. Episcopalian. Pentecostal. Quaker. Methodist. St Agatha's, down the street." She took a breath. "But I was raised Mormon. We both were."

"We were in the same home ward as kids," Helen added. Cassandra doubted the pastor knew what a "home ward" was, but she was grateful Helen resisted the urge to correct her use of the word "Mormon".

Troy betrayed the slightest flinch but recovered quickly. "And now you're here. If you don't mind me asking, what did you think about today's meeting?"

Once again, Cassandra hesitated. What was she supposed to say? "It was nice," she decided. "I liked the music." That was true enough.

There was an awkward pause as Troy waited, Cassandra was sure, for her to compliment his sermon. After a few seconds, Helen broke through the silence. "How long have you been a pastor?"

They chatted a bit longer, but Cassandra started zoning out again. This place, it was all wrong. Wrong for her, at least. These sterile white walls, the scent of coffee wafting from the weird stand in the corner, and this awkward, sweaty man with a microphone strapped to his face—she'd felt more inspired on a basketball court with carpeted floors. Lots of times, in fact. That place had been almost perfect. Almost.

With trepidation, she decided to go ahead and ask the question that had brought her here, knowing that no answer would be enough to convince her to come back. Barely listening, she waited for Troy to finish a longwinded story about his last mission-trip to Turkey, then interjected "Can I ask a question?"

"Of course," Pastor Troy answered.

Cassandra took a breath. "Are there any LGBTQ members of your congregation I could talk to?"

Pastor Troy stared at her, his expression, for once, unreadable. Finally he said, "Well, everyone's welcome here at Good Shepherd Church. I'll make some phone calls. If I find any, maybe I can introduce them to you next Sunday?"

"That's fine. No need," Cassandra said, horrified to feel tears beginning to well up in her eyes. "Thank you for the service." She took off toward the exit, hoping Helen would have the sense to follow. Before she got to the car, the tears were freely flowing down her cheeks, and she could feel sobs forming in the back of her throat.

Diving into the driver's seat and slamming the door shut, Cassandra wept. Not the happy, soulful tears of the woman at church; these were wretched, desperate heaves of pain, pent up over a lifetime of secrecy, self-loathing, shame, and injustice. Cassandra never cried. She prided herself on that. She didn't know exactly what it had been that set her off; it was hardly the most hostile encounter she'd had since she'd come out. But something in her had broken today, and no amount of composure would hold it in.

Fortunately, Helen had only been a few steps behind her, and Cassandra soon felt her best friend's arms wrapping around her from the passenger seat, felt Helen's own sympathetic tears fall off of her cheeks and into Cassandra's hair.

They lost track of how long they cried together, but the parking lot around them had emptied before Helen finally broke the silence. "I wish I knew a way to make everything better."

Cassandra sniffed, but could think of nothing to say. Eventually, Helen continued, "Maybe we should try something totally different? Like that Bahá'í meeting you mentioned?" When Cassandra didn't respond, she continued, "Or what about that Episcopalian place we tried last Sunday? They seemed really inclusive."

"They were really nice," Cassandra admitted, her voice breaking shrilly. She took a few deep breaths to compose herself. "I don't know, Helen. Nowhere feels right. Yet." The last word hung in the air unconvincingly.

"Which place did you like best?" Helen asked. "Maybe we can find similar places?"

"Like?" Cassandra repeated. She closed her eyes and slumped in her chair. Helen still didn't understand. "That's the problem, Helen. I *like* the Book of Mormon. I *like* 'Give Said the Little Stream'. I like green jello and genealogy and Family Home Evening. I just want to want to enjoy those things with my own forever family someday, with somebody I actually, completely love. I'd *like* to go *home*, to a place where all those parts of me fit. But I don't fit. I never really did. And now that my home sees me for what I am, it doesn't want me anymore."

Helen's lips started to tremble. Cassandra didn't want her to start crying again, so she continued.

"You remember the rich young man? The one who asked *What should I do to inherit eternal life?* I think about that question a lot. What am I supposed to do? Be alone my whole life, drowning in others' pity and judgment, and hope I'm magically straight if I get to heaven? Marry some poor Mormon guy so we can make each other miserable, knowing the whole thing is a sham, a mirage? Or just walk away, try to find a woman who loves me, and enjoy my life as best I can, knowing that a piece of me will always be missing and I might just get sent to Hell? What am I supposed to do, Helen?"

She didn't feel sad anymore. She felt angry. Angry at her brother who suddenly wouldn't let her see her nieces. Angry at her mom, who thought that she was broken. Angry at her old bishop, who felt she could get over this if she just had a bit more faith. Angry at all those ignorant comments in Sunday School about how people like her wanted to destroy the Church and the family, whatever that meant. And she was angry at the Jesus she loved so much but who didn't seem to love her enough to show her how to escape.

There was another long silence, before Cassandra whispered aloud for the first time the idea that had haunted her for years: "Maybe it would just be better for me to die."

Helen instinctively grabbed Cassandra's hand. "God wants you to be alive. Alive and," she licked her lips nervously, "and happy." Her voice trembled, barely more than a whisper. "I know that. No matter what you do. And I don't know what I'd do with myself if — if you —"

"It's all right," Cassandra interrupted, forcing what she hoped was a comforting smile. Resolutely, she fished her keys out from under the driver's seat where they had fallen and started the car. Helen was so nice. But niceness could only do so much.

"I know He wants me to be happy," she lied, straining to seem optimistic. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have said that."

Helen stared at her dubiously, holding back tears.

"Don't worry!" Cassandra went on. "I'll be fine. Bahá'í next week? I think it starts at two, so I'll just pick you up from your church, and we can go straight there."

Helen gave her hand a little squeeze and managed a weak smile of her own. "Of course, Cassandra."

"You're sure Manny won't mind?"

"He'll be fine."

Cassandra turned away and switched on the radio. She didn't feel like talking anymore; she quite felt that she'd overshared already, and she assumed Helen had no idea what else to say. As distant songs from her childhood flowed around her, she wondered if it would be better to give up on this whole pointless search. Did she really need a church? Did she even want one? Plenty of people got on just fine without organized religion. Why not her?

Her mind everywhere but the road in front of her, she somehow wound her way toward Helen's apartment, vaguely listening to the familiar melody pouring out of the radio as she went.

*Come as you are  
As you were  
As I want you to be  
As a friend  
As a friend  
As a known enemy*

The song was interrupted as she pulled up next to her best friend's door and stopped the car, feeling somehow both numb and exposed. Before leaving, Helen turned back and gave Cassandra one last, long hug.

"We'll find a place for you," Helen whispered. "I promise."

Cassandra struggled to form a sad smile and watched as Helen turned and walked away toward her apartment, toward her fiancé, toward her simple, straightforward life. Once Helen was out of sight, Cassandra started the car again and paused to let the last cadences of *memoria* wash over her.

Nothing.

She felt as dry and empty as she had at Good Shepherd Church.

She'd try that Bahá'í meeting next week. And the Charismatic Catholic one the week after. But neither would be the right place. She knew where she wanted to go. She just didn't know how to get there.

**Riley Clay** has studied education, history, and Spanish at University College London and Brigham Young University. His work has been featured by *The Copperfield Review*, *The International Association for Visual Culture*, and the Association for Mormon Letters Conference.

## Art

is not (our docent says)  
pictures composed of pure  
bloodless light. No, it is

the generations of masters  
who labored on this icon  
to wrest heavenly glory

from hammered metals  
and pigments of earth.  
It is the young woman

who hid Madonna and Child  
in the swaddling of her sack,  
the commissar who shot her.

(Our docent, lifting  
his shaking hand, points  
to the next icon.)

See what craft can do  
when acid bites  
into copper,

etching the crushed  
fronds of fern  
under the dying virgin's head

in such fine detail  
the mortal pain becomes  
a mordant beauty.

Observe the flurry of hatching  
around her staring eyes,  
and the object of their gaze—

a flowering thistle,  
emblem of wounding  
and punishment

that bristles in the sun,  
each hair casting  
its tiny scar of shade.

**J. S. Absher's** work has been published in approximately fifty journals and anthologies, including *Third Wednesday*, *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, *Tar River Poetry*, *North Carolina Literary Review*, and *San Pedro River Review*.



## Millstone

At choir practice a fellow tenor said,  
“People like that – what does the scripture say?  
Better a millstone be hung around their neck.  
I don’t think I could ever forgive a man –.”  
I swallowed hard, thinking of my dad.  
“Doesn’t Christ’s atonement cover that?”  
I asked. He stopped. A sister thanked me privately.

A neighbor’s name was splattered in the news.  
His daughter’s name was not, but all could figure.  
He turned himself in: first to his furious wife,  
and then after arrangements, to the sheriff.  
I cried for the daughter I could never console.  
Should I punch him in the face? An inmate did  
just that in his first hour in jail. Sometimes  
a beating helps the soul. A bruising for sin.  
When I viewed him first in court, he’d fasted away  
his midlife belly and pretend confidence.  
Stripped of priesthood, stripped of pride.  
In the county jail, through plexiglass and phone  
I saw the bruise and stitches above his eye.  
He said his wife had told him of my dad.

The calling rested on me. I’d surprise him,  
stealing time from work, as random as if  
the Lord had planned it. Double gate, ID, and keys.  
Buy him an orange pop and me a Pepsi.  
Sit across a square table in the pen,  
*penitentiary*, from penitent.  
He hurt but knew that he had others hurt.  
He prayed for hope and listened, never pressed.  
He told me he’d never known God till now.  
Appalled by his sin was I – was he – but not  
by the sinner. I told my wife it felt like  
going to the temple. We’d talk of trials,  
of joys, of learning to expect the worst  
from those for whom a stone would never be enough.

**Alan Rex Mitchell** has published poetry, novels, doctrinal books, scientific papers, technical reports, and raises top quality American Wagyu at the Bennion Beef ranch, Vernon, Utah.

## Bethesda

I struggle in the dark, narrow booth  
jabbing my elbows as I remove my shirt  
and almost slip off the fold down bench  
as I wriggle out of my underpants.

Finally dressed and showered poolside  
I patiently wait with two-dozen women,  
the only man in the Fibromyalgia/MS group,  
for the mothers with toddlers to clear out

of the warm, menthol-blue, soothing water –  
my Bethesda – which in Hebrew and Aramaic  
means both (dis)grace and mercy,  
as was illness in Jesus' time,

a transgression, a fall from grace.  
Bethesda – thought to be a myth  
until Schick uncovered the bath  
just as written in St. John's Gospel:

"Beyond the Sheep's Gate," a pool  
with five porticos where the infirm  
sat or lay waiting for the angel  
to stir the waters, the first one in, healed.

The pool guard removes the floating chord  
that separates the shallows from the deep  
and the swimmers rush in as I slowly enter  
the only water that doffs the fire

inside my feet, legs, back and groin.  
Standing up front, I focus on the instructor,  
my movements synchronized with hers,  
my earplugs muffling a dozen conversations.

Bethesda, my weekly ritual,  
buoyant in the angel's gift for an hour,  
which carries me through  
the remainder of each week.

**Bryan R. Monte** is the editor and publisher of *Amsterdam Quarterly*.

## So Ask No More...

“Non impedir lo suo fatale andare:  
Vuolsi così colá dove si puote  
Ció che si vuole, e piú non dimandare”

(Hinder thou not his fate-ordained advance;  
thus is it yonder willed, where there is power  
to do whate'er is willed; so ask no more!  
Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy, Inferno, Canto V*, vers. 22-24,  
transl. by Courtney Langdon.)

Amaliel drifted among splendors he was unfamiliar with.

He waved aside the surrounding air, which was heavy like a veil, and felt that the iridescent Doorway of Encounters was some distance away. He was afraid and anxious...

It had all started some eons ago, when he fulfilled his assignments in the Globe next to other colleagues of the Evening Star. He knew he his task well, namely, to figure out the weaknesses and tendencies of the poor souls that wandered through that lone and dreary world so that he could motivate them to break the promises they had made before leaving their Home. Of course, the Great Forgetfulness, which the Father had decreed upon everyone entering the Globe, was a lot of help in carrying out this task. In this way, everyone in the Globe would recognize that the Plan was a failure and would once again consider the Star's proposal, which had caused the Big Battle and Banishment.

Every time he descended to the Globe, he would run into the Elder Brother's colleagues, who, at the other side of the Boundary, carried out commands that were at odds with his own. He knew all of them by now: Domiel, Adiriel, Mehiel, and others. He had clashed fiercely several times with Sabrael over some lost soul. Sometimes the Archangel Ophaniel would join them. Both sides saw successes and failures, but ultimately Brother Lucifer's Master Design would win out.

Some planetary orbits ago, he had been assigned to watch/control a young couple that carried out their wandering of the World. Their earthly names were Pablo and Eliza. They had recently married, and their first pregnancy had now ended in a miscarriage. Pain and frustration were tangible in their lives. Amaliel was adept at working with pain, at pulling on the strings of the soul to the breaking point. Many couples tore themselves apart when facing challenges. This couple in particular were followers of the

Elder Brother and read regularly from the pages of the Book. Therefore, they were high value targets.

Something unexplainable happened then... While Amaliel attempted to exert influence on their ideas/wills, their own feelings began suddenly entering his mind/heart with unprecedented force. This he was not prepared for. Intense waves of what Pablo and Eliza felt for each other, for their unbirthed child, and for the Elder Brother spread through him with stunning power.

He did not easily recover... Something had shattered inside of him. He followed his bleak itinerary back to the infernal regions harboring doubt as to the Master Design's eventual success.

Amaliel was sitting in Superior Inspector Rashiel's office. Rashiel's blazing and inquisitive gazes indicated bad things to come.

"What's the matter, Amaliel? Are you no longer enjoying your visits to the Globe? You used to be one of the best punishing brethren, but your performance has diminished significantly," he said with almost tangible anger from his desk upon its raised platform.

"Nothing's wrong... I just wonder about man..."

"Man? That tiny bubble in the mud? That meaningless stirring in the sludge? That thing? That Adam? That Edomite, as he has been rightly called?"

"Yes, but..."

"Your task is not to worry about man. He's an old brother who has chosen evil. You are to continue doing as you have done all along – disturbing, afflicting, and bending him as far as permitted. When it was necessary to ruin his hopes, mock his sacrifices, darken his life, or torture his soul, I would preferably turn to you. Now you've become soft..."

"It so happens that I find something honorable in him, in his hard life..." Even though Amaliel would never admit it, he could not stop thinking about Pablo and Eliza.

"Look at this thing we call the Globe," said Rashiel as he came down from his platform and placed a condescending hand on Amaliel's shoulder. "Look at that cold planet trapped in the emptiness of space. It is a pile of mud turning and dissolving in a watery droplet. What a great plan! Man! Whatever achievement he might have only serves to better highlight his limitations. Had it not been for our brother Lucifer, man would still

be a needless gardener attempting to care for a weedless garden where plants grew right because they did not know how to grow wrong...”

Amaliel did not say anything.

“Go perform your duty, as you have always done, or I will have to reassign you to a post in the depths of hell. I don’t think you would enjoy it. The ultimate winner and loser in this match will be decided at the end of time, but until then, we must continue to play the game. Man! You do make me laugh...,” remarked the Superior as he returned to his place hoping to bury himself again in ever-increasing paperwork. “Personally, I much prefer the octopus, which is just as intelligent but more tactful...”

The hellish laughter that followed that final comment rung in Amaliel’s ears as he walked away. He was in trouble.

Despite it all, his performance did not improve, and he was fully aware that soon Superior Rashiel would call him back in to report.

He read from the Book about the Elder Brother at every opportunity. In due time, he learned that Pablo and Eliza were expecting a new baby, and, even though he was not supposed to, he was happy for them. He no longer was who he used to be. He had become something else...

One day at sunrise in the area of the Globe where he worked, Amaliel saw Archangel Ophaniel among the opposing Brethren of Light. He crept closer to the Boundary until a voice/thought entered his mind.

“Why do you come to me, Child of Disobedience? You know there can be no dealings between us.”

“I wish to be taught about the Eldest Brother’s missions and to receive the benefits of His shed blood.”

“That is beyond your ability or even mine. It would be a mockery of the Father’s everlasting decrees.”

“Then, what happens to repentance and the possibility of changing? Is it only a deceitful story for those who wander in the Globe?”

“You and your banished colleagues are beyond the reach of those benefits, for ever and ever...”

“But I read in the Book that His sacrifice is universal!”

“Let us discuss this no more. Go back to your tasks, and I will go back to mine. I will take your case to my fellow servants, but don’t hold out much hope. If there is an answer, you will receive it as personal inspiration, and a Doorway of Encounters will open for your safety.”

And so the mind-to-mind conversation came to an end.

Amaliel now headed definitively toward that Doorway in fear and reverence. A silhouette waited for him there. It was Gabriel of the High Spheres! He could scarcely believe that his case had made it all the way up to the top rungs in what was known in the Globe as Jacob’s Ladder.

Exquisitely disturbing colors filled the inside of the Doorway, in a marvelous ambiance where exceedingly high columns disappeared upward into the unfathomable, transparent ether. Elementary particles, spheres, and stars in orbit paraded under a heavenly blue light. Everything was sublime, fully peaceful and serenely warm.

Overwhelmed, he tried to kneel in shame.

“Amaliel, Amaliel,” the Archangel’s warm hand touched his shoulder.

“Arise. I am but your brother and fellow servant, even though we serve different masters. What is it you desire?”

“You know well what I want. I wish to go beyond the Boundary in support of the Father’s Plan.”

“That would be a violation of the Law.”

“What is the role of mercy, then?”

“I see you have been reading the Book. You therefore ought to know that mercy cannot rob justice.”

“*Die Geisterwelt ist nicht verschlossen,*” said Amaliel straight away, quoting an earthly wise man in his own language.

“Yes,” admitted Gabriel amusedly. “The spirit world is not shut. You have not wasted your visits to the Globe.”



"I need the possibility of redemption. Even if it takes eons upon eons. I will serve the servants. I will assist the suborder of the song-uttering Degalim. I will polish Israfel's apocalyptic trumpets. I will work at the ladder's lowest rungs until I prove I can be trusted. I will do whatever it takes!"

"Enough, Amaliel! Close your eyes and extend your right hand."

The banished being felt his mind/heart being pierced by an intelligent, superior power. There was not a part of his spirit that was not searched.

A gentle tug at his arm. A blinding light... And he was on the other side of the Boundary.

"It is somewhat unusual, but it has been done before," said Gabriel as he smiled. "Whatever the case may be, you could no longer return to Banishment among your brethren. Come, follow me. There is but little time. You must change clothes."

Two angels helped him put on clothes of light. Together they headed toward a white, glowing building that stood out in the distance. On the way there, he could see streets of gold, a sea of glass, and countless messengers carrying out diverse tasks. All were busy and seemed happy.

As Amaliel wondered what his punishment/fate(?) would be, they arrived at the massive gates. Beyond the threshold there was a tunnel of light that grew dimmer as it reached closer to its final destination: the Globe. His strength nearly failed him.

"There is no other way, Amaliel." He felt Gabriel's voice in his mind.

He was led to the conduit's entrance, where he was swiftly absorbed. As he descended to the Globe with extraordinary speed, he discovered the universe was filled with ineffable harmonies to which he belonged seamlessly as another note.

His vision was blurry, but he thought he recognized familiar voices and faces. All at once, the Great Forgetfulness came upon him...

"Our first child," said Pablo.

"He's beautiful," replied Eliza.

"Let's name him Pablo Amaliel."

“Amaliel? Is there someone in your family history with that name?”

“No, but it’s an angel’s name. And, to us, that’s what he’ll be for sure...”  
They held hands and watched the new arrival tenderly.

*translated by Gabriel González*

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## Collect for a Late-Winter Gulp

O, Legion, bright-gurgling from  
feral-lot oak, your chorus

a swash of eddies in this bare-bones  
estuary, the chords of your queuing

a too-easy drift into metaphor (see  
the measure, the notes, pitch, and

rhythm, progression and keeping time) –  
Embellish your undersong – Thrum, preen,

chirrup, plume, swell – psalter us through  
winter's pent-up gloom that we might pass,

again, into blooming, that we might swoon,  
again, with delusions of flight and forgetting,

with the frenzy and violence of greening,  
deep-breathing, and reverie – For you are

remembering's burden, its  
waking epiphany, its imminent tide –

Amen

**Tyler Chadwick**, an award-winning writer, editor, and teacher, received his Ph.D. in English and the Teaching of English from Idaho State University. He teaches writing at Utah Valley University and has three books to his name: two anthologies, *Fire in the Pasture: 21st Century Mormon Poets* (Peculiar Pages, 2011) and *Dove Song: Heavenly Mother in Mormon Poetry* (Peculiar Pages, 2018), and a collection of poetry and essays, *Field Notes on Language and Kinship* (Mormon Artists Group, 2013). He lives in Ogden, Utah, with his wife, Jess, and their four daughters.

## Canyon Road

Andrea placed a hand over the tight skin of her round stomach as the silver 2004 Toyota Camry swerved and rattled down Ogden Canyon. On a particularly sharp curve, she felt a tiny foot push against her ribs. The road was icy in places where the year's first snowfall had melted and frozen over again, but Andrea noted Ken's tense jaw, and decided against asking him to slow down.

He was obviously in serious thought about something unpleasant, and she thought it best to let him be while he worked through it. She watched the passing scenery of the trees and sagebrush covering the high mountain walls that enclosed the curving two lane road.

"I saw you talking to Sister Carson today after sacrament." Ken's tone was even – the statement almost, but not quite a question.

"Yeah," Andrea said, feigning nonchalance. "She asked how we're doing." Andrea thought of Sister Carson's concerned eyes gently searching her own for so long Andrea felt like crying.

"That's funny," Ken said, as his hands tightened on the steering wheel. "Because just before the priesthood meeting Brother Carson asked if my marriage was okay."

She felt her face warm with embarrassment, and she realized Sister Carson must've seen the finger shaped bruises on Andrea's wrist as she passed the sacrament tray down the pew to her. Andrea hoped Sister Carson didn't think she was spiritually weak for having a contentious marriage. What if she thought Andrea was a bad wife? Andrea felt the need to apologize to everyone for the whole situation, but didn't want Ken to know that Sister Carson might have seen the bruise.

Ken turned his head to look at her swerving slightly before returning his eyes to the road. "I don't know why you're blushing, you're not the one who was publicly humiliated."

"I'm sorry." Andrea said, the words reflexively falling from her lips. She closed her eyes for the space of a breath before opening them to watch the passing scenery. Andrea could see small patches of dirty snow piled in pools of shade where the sun's rays had

not been able to reach the earth. Even in mid-November, this mountain view held a certain beauty that demanded recognition.

"I've been thinking of baby names," Ken said, reclaiming her attention.

"Me too," said Andrea and she felt a little tension leave her shoulders. "Not knowing the gender is harder than I thought it would be."

Ken chuckled and moved his right hand off of the steering wheel to rest it gently on her thigh. "I'm still glad we decided to wait."

"Of course." Andrea pinched a bit of fabric from her loose skirt and twiddled it between her fingers. "I still like Timothy or Kyler if it's a boy."

"Those are good," Ken said. He glanced in the rearview before asking, "What if it's a girl?"

Andrea thought for a moment observing how the road in front of them hugged the mountain, leaving barely enough space for a person to walk between the painted yellow line and the jagged wall of rock and undergrowth.

"Honestly, I like too many of them to choose," Andrea eventually replied with a disparaging chuckle.

"What do you think of the name Angelina Kate?" Ken suggested. "That way her initials could be A and K after you and me."

"Oh, I love that!" Andrea said, pulling out her phone quickly tapping the idea in the notes folder labeled: BABY IDEAS.

Ken replaced his hand on the steering wheel to navigate a particularly sharp curve on the canyon road. Just as they cleared the curve, a loud dull thud sounded from the back of the car and Andrea felt the vehicle tip slightly.

"Damn it!" Ken cursed as he pulled the car over.

Andrea watched nervously as he hit the dashboard, turned off the ignition and left the car, slamming the door behind him. She was desperate not to worsen the situation but unsure whether or not he wanted her to stay in the car or to follow him out. Would he get upset if she stayed in the car? Or upset if she got out of the car? Andrea decided to grab her oversized peacoat and phone before stepping out into the cold biting air.

Ken was hunched over inspecting the back left tire. "At least the rim isn't damaged," he grumbled before straightening to retrieve the spare from the trunk.

The tire was almost comically flat, a puddle of rubber like a popped black balloon. She was grateful it had given out where there was a big enough patch of dirt to pull over on, rather than along the stretch of road they had been traveling moments earlier. The ground was so compressed, she knew this spot must be used as a parking space for hikers and rock climbers during the summer. It was icy in places where the year's first snowfall had melted and frozen over again. Andrea shivered and did up the buttons of her coat. Despite its large fit and sleeves that hung off her wrists, the coat still pulled tight over her belly. The buttons and their respective buttonholes pulled against each other, as if they too were threatening to snap. Andrea felt useless standing beside the car, watching Ken heft out the spare and jack up the car but not knowing how to help, stayed where she was.

"Would you like me to call your Mom and let her know we'll be a little late?" Andrea asked.

"No," Ken snapped. "We don't want her to have another reason not to like you."

Andrea self-consciously straightened her spine and slipped her phone back into the coat pocket it had come from.

"You don't think she likes me?" Andrea twisted a mud flecked pebble into the ground with the toe of her boot.

Ken didn't look up from the tire iron he was wrenching around a lug-nut.

"Don't you think it's kind of obvious?"

"I had no idea," Andrea insisted. "What did I do to —"

"Andrea," Ken said with a sigh. "Don't you think you should ask what you haven't done?"

A white SUV rumbled past them and Andrea shook her head in confusion. Ken removed the tire iron from the now loose lug-nut, but rather than begin work on the next one, stood and stared her in the eyes.

"She is my Mom, so she wants the best for me." Ken gestured, swinging the tire iron as he spoke. "She mentioned disappointment with your behavior. Probably because you create drama all the time and don't care enough to spend Mother's Day with her."

Andrea sucked cold air into her lungs and exhaled a deep breath of guilt and frustration. Mother's day had been the first anniversary of her grandmother's death and her Mom was struggling, so rather than attend Sunday dinner at her in-laws with Ken she had chosen to visit her own family.

The tire iron still arched in gyrating circles, the movement indicating that Ken wasn't done speaking. "She's also pointed out that you don't take as good care of yourself as an expecting mother should; she might be worried that you'll be a bad mom."

"That's not true." Andrea retorted. "I eat right and I go on long walks. I want this baby to be healthy and —"

A tire iron flew past her head, effectively silencing her. It landed a few feet away, bouncing slightly before coming to rest on the hard dirt. Ken was saying something about her being the liar, not him, and how rude she was, but Andrea couldn't process the words.

Her mind was frozen, in the way a scratched DVD pauses a movie without warning.

*Not okay, Andrea thought. This is not okay.*

Andrea's feet were rooted in the ground and she unconsciously held her breath as Ken stalked past her and retrieved the tire iron. On his way back, Ken stopped just in front of Andrea, gently twinning his free hand through her loose brown hair and softly kissing her forehead like he used to when they were engaged.

"I'm so sorry for losing my temper." Ken leaned back slightly, looking intently into her wide eyes. "But you really shouldn't be acting like this on a Sunday."

"Ken. You could have killed me." Andrea's voice wobbled, shaking tears loose.

Frowning, Ken dropped his hand from her hair and took a step back. "Don't be dramatic Andrea, you know that's not true." Ken probably would have said more if a familiar-looking dark-green Ford pickup hadn't pulled over and rolled down the passenger window.

"Is that who I think it is?" A light-hearted voice called through the open window.

"Stop crying," Ken ordered quickly.

Andrea obliged, lifting her eyes to the grey cloud-filled sky above and blinking rapidly. She didn't know if it was fear or sheer power of will, but Andrea held back the newly formed tears.

She also had recognized the voice, it belonged to Steve Hale. He had been Andrea and Ken's bishop before they'd gotten married and moved out of the ward.

"Bishop Hale!" Ken said, turning towards the truck. Ken affected a light carefree posture while every bit of harsh tension seemed to evaporate from his body.

Bishop Hale stepped out of the truck, insisting that Ken call him Steve and let him stay in case they needed help with the tire. Ken conceded with a hearty handshake and led the way to the tire. Bishop Hale had a wide smile and receding hairline; based on the suit and tie he was wearing, Andrea guessed he had just come from a church function. He hiked up the fabric of his slacks before squatting to inspect Ken's progress on the tire. The two men talked and laughed as they took turns loosening the remaining lug-nuts.

"Andrea," Bishop Hale said, looking up at her from his frog-like position beside Ken on the ground. Ken's wrenching slowed. "Are you all right?" Bishop Hales's words came oddly slow, as if he were speaking to her through a shut window.

After a quick glance at Ken, now turned towards her, Andrea replied, "Yeah, just a little queasy from driving on this crazy road." She attempted a smile, "I'll take a quick walk and see if that helps."

Ken's eyes narrowed and his mouth formed a hard line.

"That's no fun, I hope a walk will help," Steve said. He followed Andrea's gaze to Ken whose face transformed into an easy smile.

"If you think it will help," Ken said, adding an earnest, "Please be careful."

Andrea didn't reply, but instead forcibly commanded her feet to move and began walking the length of the dirt pull-off. As her eyes scanned the edge of the clearing she noticed a space in the brown undergrowth. Everything about the spot told her it was a popular trailhead in the summer. The trailhead called to Andrea, seeming to promise a momentary escape from the anxiety and fear. Her pace was brisk and almost panicked as she picked her way over rocks and around muddy depressions.

Andrea knew once the spare was on and Steve had left that Ken would come for her and he would be angry, but at the moment Andrea didn't care. She had accepted his anger as the central reality of her life. It was painful to remember how happy she had been to marry him in the temple. In two short years the promise of a marriage that would last through the eternities had been turned from a blessing to a damning condemnation. After a few yards, her pace slowed and became more of a labored wobble than walk as the trail steepened. The cathartic movement cleared the fog from her head allowing Andrea freedom of thought. With this clarity Andrea realized that she could no longer keep living this life.

*I could tell someone . . . maybe go somewhere. I could leave him.*

Andrea was quick to dismiss the thought. Not because of what she thought Ken might do. The neighbors looked up to him, his family adored him, and everyone at church



seemed to think he was a strong spiritual leader. They'd even made him a youth leader, putting him in charge of teaching teenage boys how to be "worthy men". Chances were, they'd think she was making it up; playing the victim to validate her feelings in an unhappy marriage. Sometimes, Andrea worried that herself.

The trail began to level out a bit as it curved around the crest of a hill before continuing to weave up the face of the mountain. This is where she stopped, out of breath and unable to hike any farther. She turned towards the edge of the hill, noting the sheer descent created by rock and erosion.

Andrea absentmindedly wondered if a person could die jumping off this hill, but no, it wasn't steep enough to offer a quick death. Then she felt that tell-tale kick against her ribs.

She lifted a hand to her belly and pressed back, shocked with the realization of how hopeless she had become.

"You're right," she said to the unnamed child. "It was a silly thought."

And so she stood still, staring at nothing, not wanting to die, but unable to face another day with Ken.

The brisk wind whipped tendrils of long hair across Andrea's face. She frantically swiped them out of her eyes and turned away from the hill's eroded cliff-like edge, ignoring its promise of escape. Her eyes absorbed the November world of sleeping elm trees and decaying leaves. Gone were the vibrant colors of a happy fall, leaving behind only a promise of winter and the threat of death.

With every rustle of branches, Andrea felt her heart pulse harder. She didn't wonder if Ken would come for her. That wasn't the question. No, the question was what he would do to her once he did. Andrea could almost feel the calloused pads of his palms brushing across her cheek as he cupped her face, but there was a tightness in her throat, as if this imaginary hand had moved its way down her pale neck and begun to squeeze.

"Andrea!" Even though she heard him coming, and knew he would see her standing on the edge of the steep hill, Andrea flinched at the sound of his voice.

"What the hell were you thinking?" Ken yelled. It was more an accusation than a question. But she hadn't been thinking, acting only on the instinct to get away from him.

"I'm sorry. You were just so angry I—"

Ken strode toward her, his strong legs making easy work of uneven ground beneath his feet. He only stopped once he was close enough that Andrea could see the tight lines around his hard hazel eyes.

No longer shouting, Ken asked quietly, "You thought I was angry then?" The low soft timber of his voice sounded almost like a growl and Andrea felt adrenaline turn her veins cold, like an IV had just been flushed.

Before she knew what was happening, his hand cracked against the right side of her face. The world spun as her ears rang, and her eyes instantly watered. She began to crumple to the ground, but Ken grabbed her forearms and hoisted her up to face him, digging his large fingers into the tender insides of her arm. His lips were curled up in a half-snarl, half-smile that quickly replaced Andrea's pain with panic.

"Let me go, please."

"No."

And then she kicked him.

The first kick glanced off his shin, but Andrea was fighting now, and her second kick landed hard against the side of his knee. Ken grunted in pain, briefly loosening his grip. Andrea jerked back, fighting to free herself from his grasp. Ken grabbed again, attempting for a better hold on her. Twisting, Andrea shoved him away. The movement throwing both of them off balance. Andrea was a dead weight as gravity wrenched her from Ken's grasp and dumped her unceremoniously onto the cold ground. Andrea's rump took most of the fall, but she pushed a steadying hand against the ground barely noticing the bits of rock that dug into the palm that was keeping her upright. She looked up in time to register the shock on Ken's face as he scrambled for purchase, his foot stepping behind him and finding nothing but air. He let out a startled shout before tumbling backward and out of view. The sound of breaking branches mixed with his frightened screams.

When the screaming changed to loud cries of pain, Andrea dared to peer down at the crumpled form of her husband. His left leg was twisted up and out like a broken claymation figurine, and blood seeped from his right shoulder.

Andrea could barely understand the mix of obscenities and threats that Ken screamed at her, catching something along the lines of "crazy bitch" and "kill you." A moment later his head lolled to the side and he was unconscious. Staring down at the broken body of the man who had caused her so much pain, the tears she had held at bay for so long finally broke free in a torrential flow that had her gasping for breath. The child inside her stirred unsettled.

"I know," Andrea sobbed, heart breaking for her unborn baby. "You deserve something better." A thought came unbidden, gently slipping between the confusion and trauma that scarred her mind.

*So do you.*

It was a feather fluttering in and lightly tickling the forefront of her consciousness.

*So do you.*

~ ~ ~

The first responders came quickly and worked efficiently, helping Ken regain consciousness and transporting him back down the trail. It wasn't long before Ken was strapped in a gurney, his whitewashed face now slightly purple in the flashing blue and red lights.

"I'm going to need my keys," Andrea told the nearest paramedic as they were loading him into the ambulance. "They're in his right front pocket."

The paramedic turned and fished the keys from Ken's pants.

"What are you doing?" Ken mumbled, eyes shifting unsteadily from the paramedic to Andrea. They both ignored him as the other paramedics moved Ken further into the ambulance, blocking him from view.

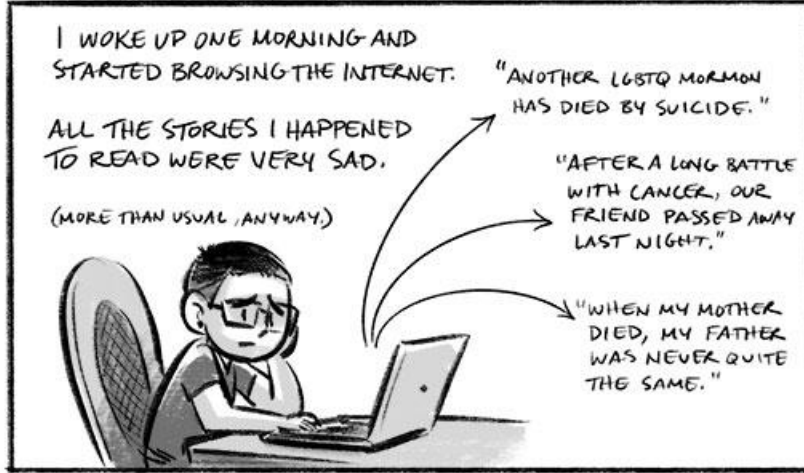
"Will you be following us to the hospital?" he asked.

"Actually," Andrea said reaching her hand out and accepting the keys. "I think I'll find my own way."

**K. Holloway** is an ambitious writer who is passionate about reading and creating literature that has the power to change the way people see the world. Besides reading and writing she enjoys dancing, hiking with her amazing husband and playing with dogs. She loves Italian food and has been fighting a crime show addiction for quite some time.

MORE THAN YOU CAN BEAR

(TW: SUICIDE, DEPRESSION, STUPID PLATITUDES)



GROWING UP IN A RELIGIOUS SPACE, I HEARD THIS PHRASE A LOT:

"God will never give you more than you can bear."

I THINK THAT'S GARBAGE.



LIFE BECOMES TOO MUCH FOR A LOT OF PEOPLE TO BEAR.



THE PHRASE CARRIES SO MUCH IMPLIED BAGGAGE.



I CAME UP WITH A NEW PHRASE:

→ (OR LIFE, OR THE UNIVERSE, OR WHATEVER ENERGY MOVES YOU)  
*God will never give you more than you can bear TOGETHER.*

THIS PRESENTS TWO MAIN QUESTIONS:

<p>WHO CAN I ASK FOR HELP?</p> <p>FAMILY FRIENDS GOD EDUCATORS COMMUNITY HEALTH PROFESSIONALS</p>	<p>WHAT AM I DOING TO HELP OTHERS?</p> <p>SERVICE TIME CHECK-INS DONATIONS A KIND MEANINGFUL NOTE CONVERSATIONS VOLUNTEER</p>
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WHEN LIFE BECOMES TOO MUCH, WE MUST SEE IT NOT AS A FAILURE OF THE INDIVIDUAL, BUT AS A WEAKNESS OF ALL OF US AS A WHOLE.

<p>WHEN WE CAST PEOPLE INTO THE MARGINS</p> <p>#BLM</p> 	<p>WHEN WE NEGLECT SOCIETAL PROBLEMS</p> 	<p>WHEN WE SHAME OURSELVES INTO ISOLATION</p> <p>"DON'T BE SUCH A SNOWFLAKE."</p> <p>"PULL YOURSELF UP BY YOUR BOOTSTRAPS."</p>
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IT DEMANDS THAT WE THINK ABOUT HOW TO LIFT AND TAKE CARE OF OTHERS AND ELIMINATES THE SHAME OF NEEDING OTHERS.



IT'S NOT WEAK OR BURDENSOME TO ASK FOR HELP.



AND WHEN YOU SEE PAIN,  
WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO  
MAKE LIFE EASIER FOR  
OTHERS TO BEAR?

MEW!



(IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE BIG)

I DON'T THINK ANY APHORISM IS GOING TO BE PERFECT.  
LIFE WILL STILL BE TOO MUCH FOR SOME TO BEAR,  
AND WE WON'T KNOW WHAT MORE WE COULD HAVE DONE.



BUT IN WHATEVER WAY  
WE HEAL AND LEARN AND  
GET BETTER, WE WILL  
DO IT TOGETHER.

EVERYTHINGISGOINGTOBEOKCOMIC.COM

**Dani Jones** is an illustrator, artist, comics creator, and writer. She earned her BFA degree from Brigham Young University – Idaho in Illustration and has been working as a freelance illustrator and independent creator for over a decade. She currently lives in New Hampshire with her cats Charles and George. This comic first appeared on her site [Everything Is Going to Be OK](http://Everything Is Going to Be OK).