



Joyful
Thanksgiving



from Reflections by the Pond
by David S. Lampel

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The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge.

Psalm 19:1-2

If winter is the time for quiet introspection, then spring is the time for abandoned praise; if winter is when the earth sleeps in its annual Sabbath, then spring is when all joy bursts forth as a result.

A Joyful Song

The wrens have returned, the males staking their claims on the houses placed around the property and making their preparations for coaxing a female to make a home with them. Between trips shuttling twigs from the ground to the interior of the house, the tiny wren will pause upon a nearby branch to lift his vibrant song to the sky.

Now the lilting melodies of the meadowlark join with the ratcheting calls of the pheasant and wild turkey. The mockingbird and brown thrasher fill the air with their glorious, variegated songs so energetically pronounced.

The robins, too, add their simple voice to the chorus, while they pull up worms from the soil and build their mud-lined nests for the family that will soon be bursting its seams.

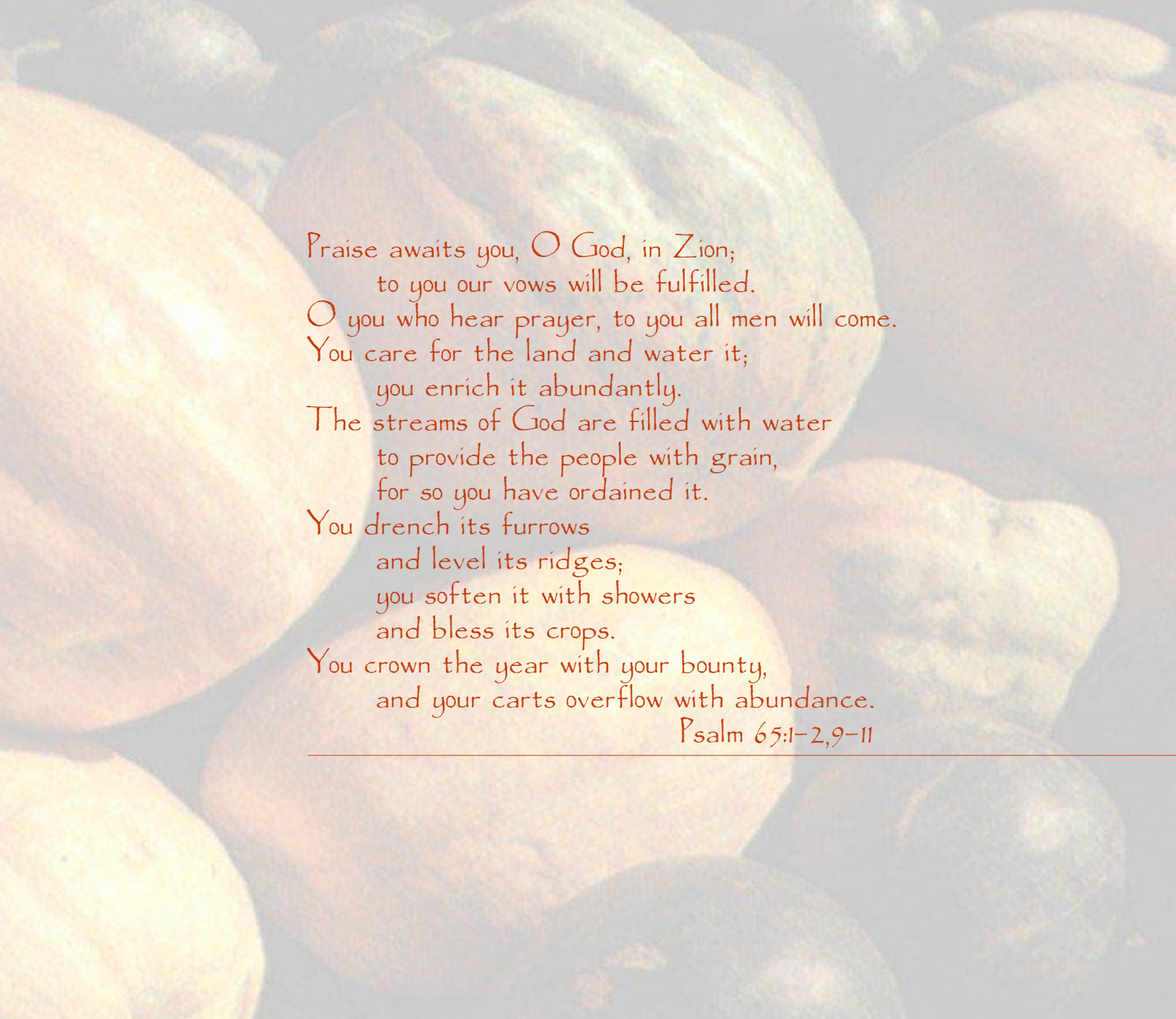
And some of the Pharisees called to Him from the crowd, “Teacher, rebuke Your disciples.” But He answered and

said to them, “I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out.” Luke 19:39-40 NKJV

Now the hard truth may be that, if their songs were translated, those birds would be simply giving voice to the more mundane necessities of life. The small wren in his full-voiced melody may only be saying, “Where are you? I’m lonely!” The mockingbird may really be saying, “Oh yeah! Well, take this!” And the robin may simply be muttering to himself, “Now where is that worm? He was here just a minute ago.”

But if the true worth of an utterance is the emotion it stirs in the breast, then this winged chorus is lifting praises to their creator. One cannot stand in the midst of this choir without feeling himself in God’s cathedral. As the air is filled with their rejoicing, the human heart is overwhelmed with praise and adoration of the One who filled the earth with so many good things.

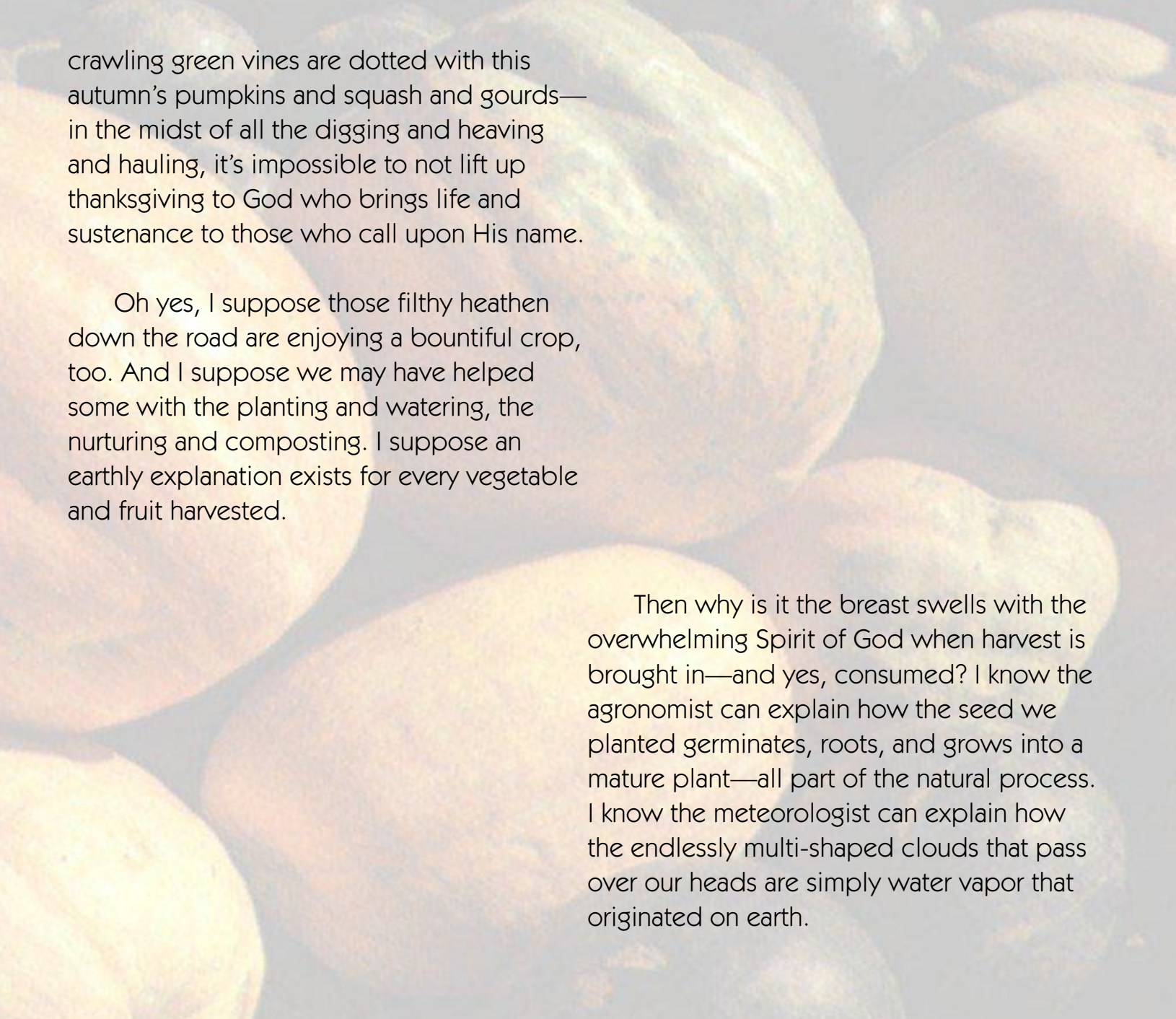
Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord!
Psalm 150:6



Praise awaits you, O God, in Zion;
to you our vows will be fulfilled.
O you who hear prayer, to you all men will come.
You care for the land and water it;
you enrich it abundantly.
The streams of God are filled with water
to provide the people with grain,
for so you have ordained it.
You drench its furrows
and level its ridges;
you soften it with showers
and bless its crops.
You crown the year with your bounty,
and your carts overflow with abundance.
Psalm 65:1-2,9-11

God Dwells There

It's difficult to harvest the land's bounty without giving praise to our generous God. When the bushel baskets are mounded with plump tomatoes; when the cart is filled with dirt-dusted potatoes, red and white and golden yellow; when the air is filled with the fragrance of onions and garlic and fat carrots that have sprouted pointy feet; when the



crawling green vines are dotted with this autumn's pumpkins and squash and gourds—in the midst of all the digging and heaving and hauling, it's impossible to not lift up thanksgiving to God who brings life and sustenance to those who call upon His name.

Oh yes, I suppose those filthy heathen down the road are enjoying a bountiful crop, too. And I suppose we may have helped some with the planting and watering, the nurturing and composting. I suppose an earthly explanation exists for every vegetable and fruit harvested.

Then why is it the breast swells with the overwhelming Spirit of God when harvest is brought in—and yes, consumed? I know the agronomist can explain how the seed we planted germinates, roots, and grows into a mature plant—all part of the natural process. I know the meteorologist can explain how the endlessly multi-shaped clouds that pass over our heads are simply water vapor that originated on earth.

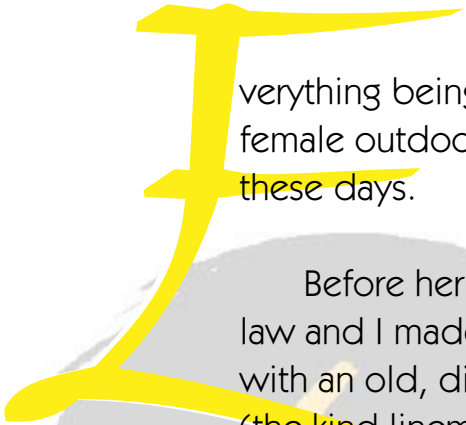
How can I explain to them that I see God in the plant that sprouts and grows, and I see Him in the passing clouds that paint the blue sky? How can I explain that even when the back is aching from digging the potatoes, when the hands are raw from washing and peeling the tomatoes, when the humid summer air is made even more miserable from the rising steam off the canner filled with jars of beans—how can I possibly explain that God dwells there in all of it?

O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder
Consider all the works Thy hands have made,
I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
Thy power thro'out the universe displayed.

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee;
How great Thou art, how great Thou art!
(Stuart K. Hine)

. . . being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light.

Colossians 1:11-12



Everything being equal, I'd say Angel (our female outdoor cat) has a pretty good life these days.

Before her first winter here, my father-in-law and I made Angel a "house." Beginning with an old, discarded cherry picker bucket (the kind linemen work from when servicing power lines), we lined the inside of the fiberglass box with insulation. Then we cut a small hole in the front of what was originally a step, so that she would have not only an entrance, but a protected one, much like the doorway into an igloo. Finally, we upended the box over a bed of two woolen blankets and nudged it up against the back stoop leading into the house.

Thanksgiving

Angel took to her new home immediately. We placed her food and water under the stoop, but rain and weather could still get in through the cracks between the boards and through the steps. So I covered the top of the stoop with plastic, and nailed boards over the openings around the steps. Now Angel has her own protected porch just in front of her house. Now rain won't drip down into her food, and snow won't drift in around the entrance to her house.

Physically, Angel is fairing just as well. Her ears have healed, she has filled out, her coat is thick and luxuriant, and she is filled with energy and vitality, loving to race up the trees in her play.

When I look at her now, and run my hand over her downright distended belly, I can't help but think back to that September day when she traipsed out of the woods and into our lives—gaunt, pregnant, and desperately hungry. When I look into her shining, attentive eyes, I remember the hollow gaze they had that fateful day when we offered her a first bowl of food. And I imagine that Angel has much to be thankful for.

As do I. And just as Angel has her benefactors, so I have mine. I have someone who gives me shelter and food, and who cares about my health and well-being. I have someone who loves me, someone who has an interest in my future and my happiness.

I remember how I was before I met my benefactor.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. Colossians 1:21

But now, because of Him, I am different, I am healthy—I have a future.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— Colossians 1:22

And so, this Thanksgiving, I will be giving thanks.

And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians 3:17



Awakening to Song

Wake up, wake up, Deborah!
Wake up, wake up, break out
in song! Arise, O Barak!
Judges 5:12a

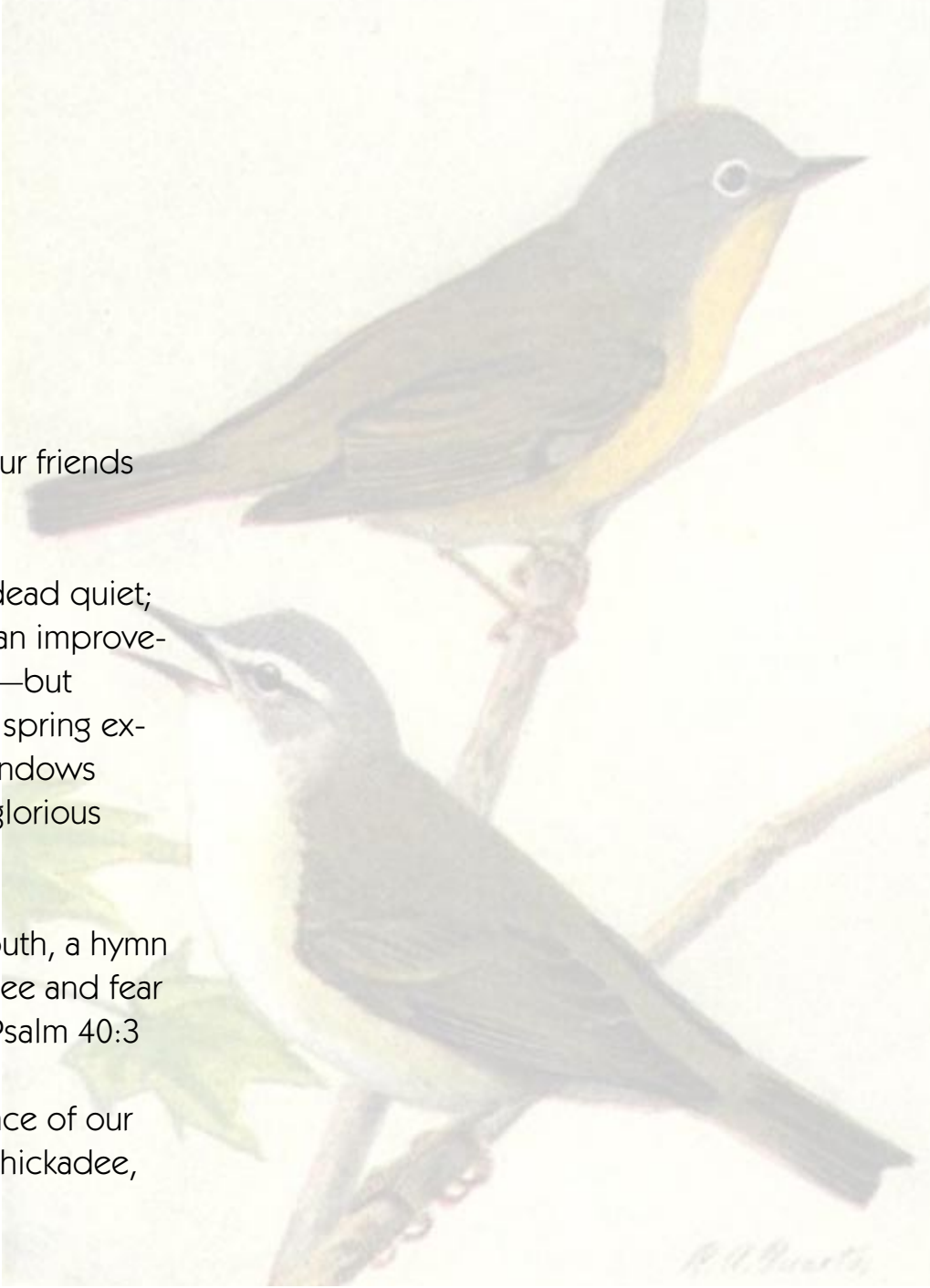


In the spring of each year our friends return.

In the winter we awaken to dead quiet; pleasant enough—and certainly an improvement over the clamor of the city—but uninspiring. Now, however, with spring exploding all around us and the windows swung wide, we awaken to the glorious songs of the returning birds.

He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God. Many will see and fear and put their trust in the LORD. Psalm 40:3

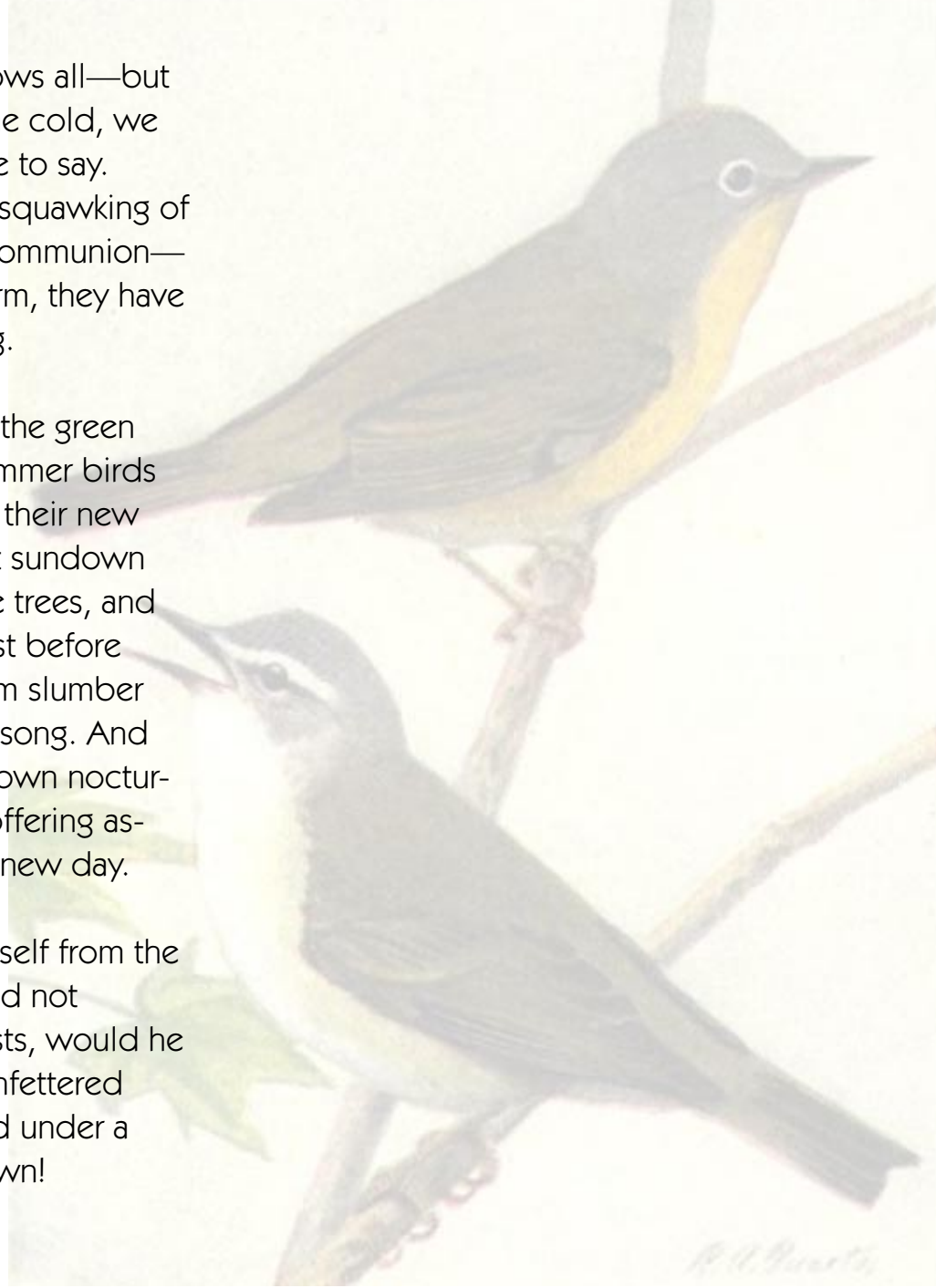
Not to diminish the importance of our winter companions—nuthatch, chickadee,



blue jay and cardinal; good fellows all—but with the house closed tight to the cold, we seldom hear what little they have to say. Save for the occasional metallic squawking of the blue jay, it's mostly a silent communion—as if they're so busy keeping warm, they have no energy left with which to sing.

But when the air warms and the green things spring back to life, the summer birds return to populate the land with their new colors and extravagant songs. At sundown they tuck themselves away in the trees, and the world falls gently still. But just before dawn they rouse themselves from slumber and fill the air with their jubilant song. And the chorus lifts us up out of our own nocturnal meanderings, each melody offering ascending steps into the light of a new day.

O, that such joy sprang by itself from the heart of man—that in himself, and not spurred by the coaching of beasts, would he greet the day with boundless, unfettered abandon. There is life to be lived under a God unashamed to call us His own!

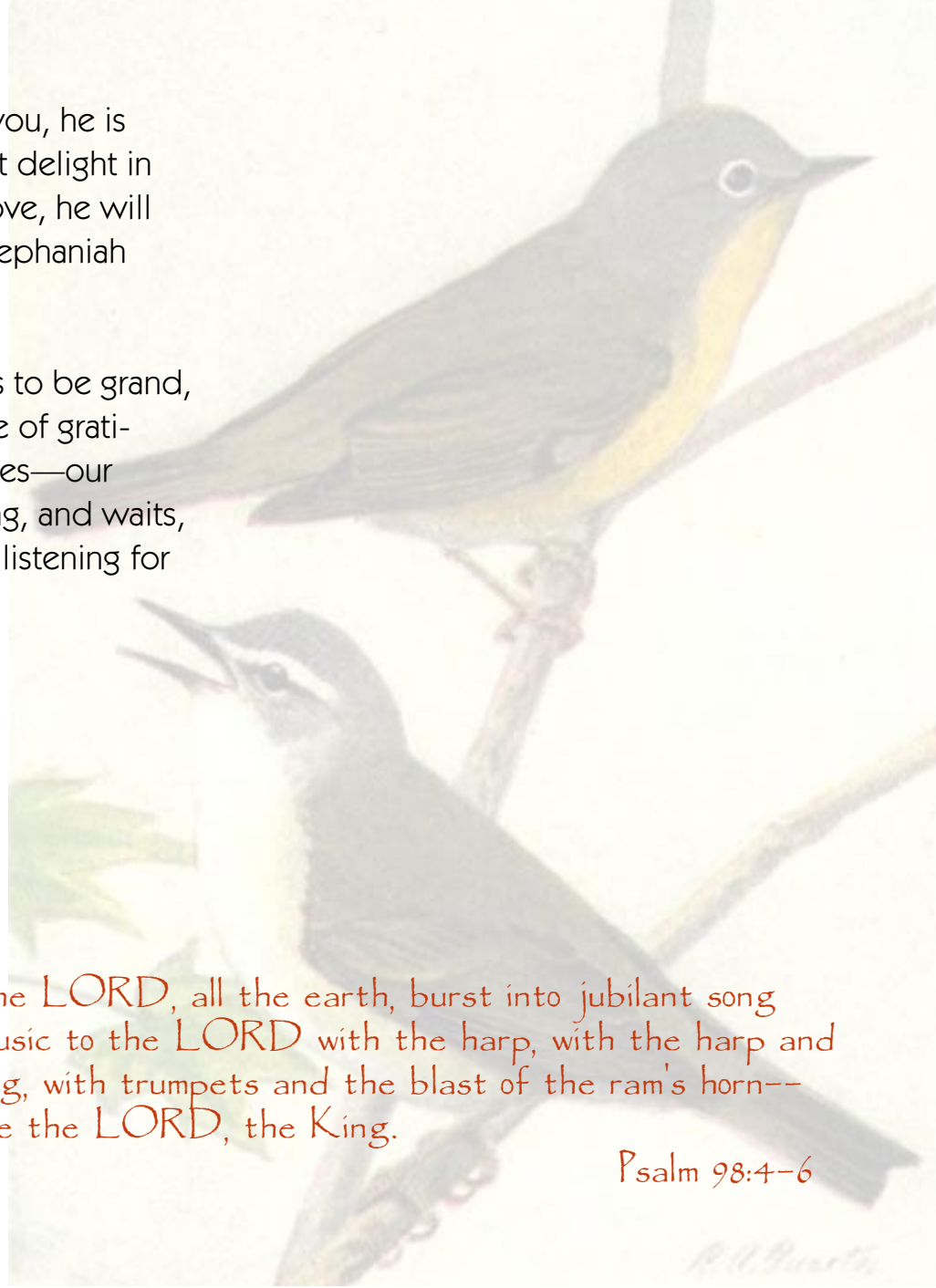


The LORD your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing. Zephaniah 3:17

The song of the redeemed is to be grand, and filled with the hearty volume of gratitude. He welcomes—He deserves—our praise and unbridled thanksgiving, and waits, expectantly, at the break of day, listening for the joy to sing from our lips.

Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the LORD with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn-- shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

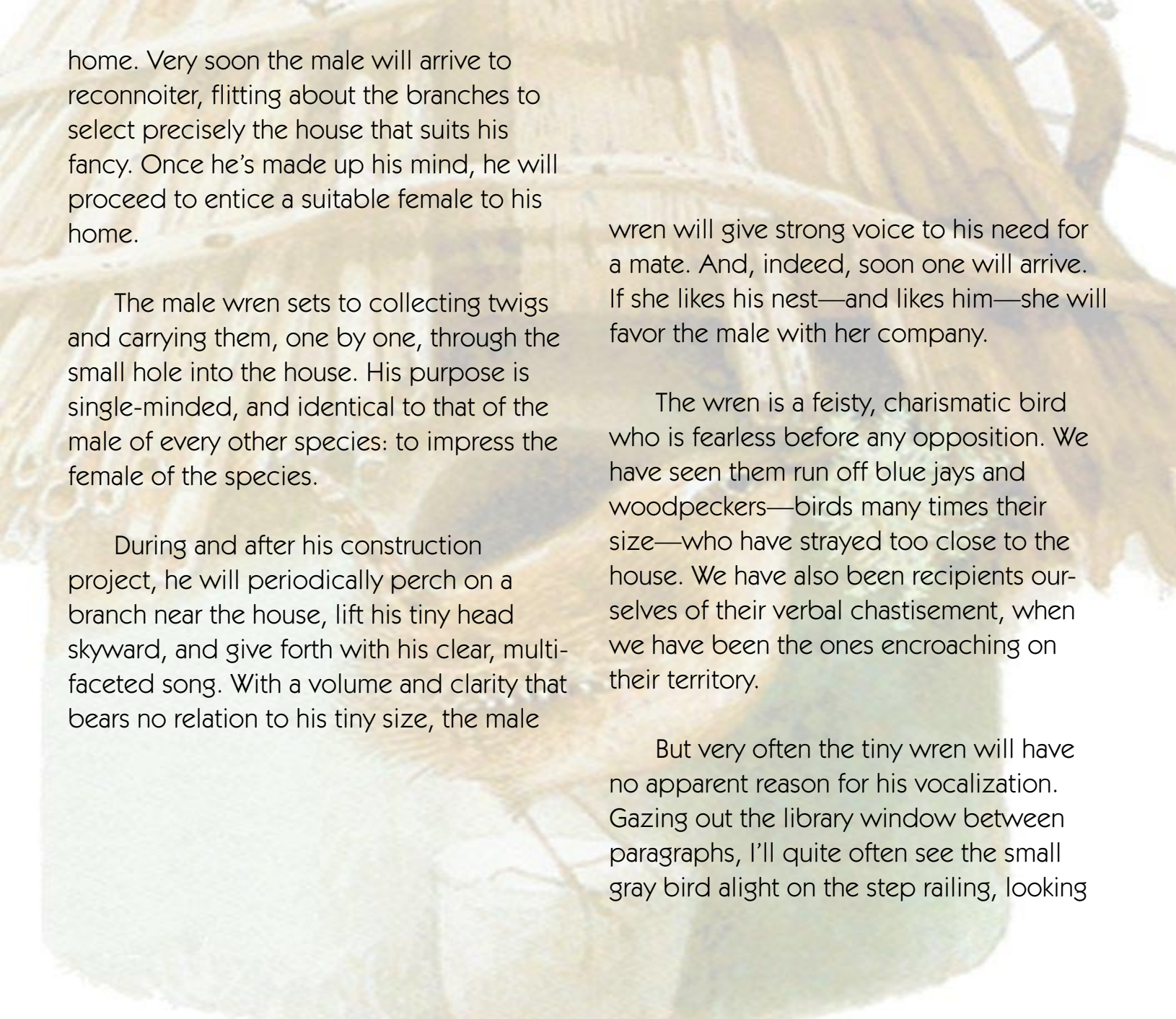
Psalm 98:4-6



Sing for Joy!

ut of all the myriad voices in the chorus that awakens us each morning, it is the voice of the smallest that predominates. Out of all the many birds that rise and give voice during the dawn, it is the tiny wren—barely larger than a hummingbird—whose voice is the loudest and most distinctive.

We invite the tiny creatures every spring by setting out houses in the trees that surround our



home. Very soon the male will arrive to reconnoiter, flitting about the branches to select precisely the house that suits his fancy. Once he's made up his mind, he will proceed to entice a suitable female to his home.

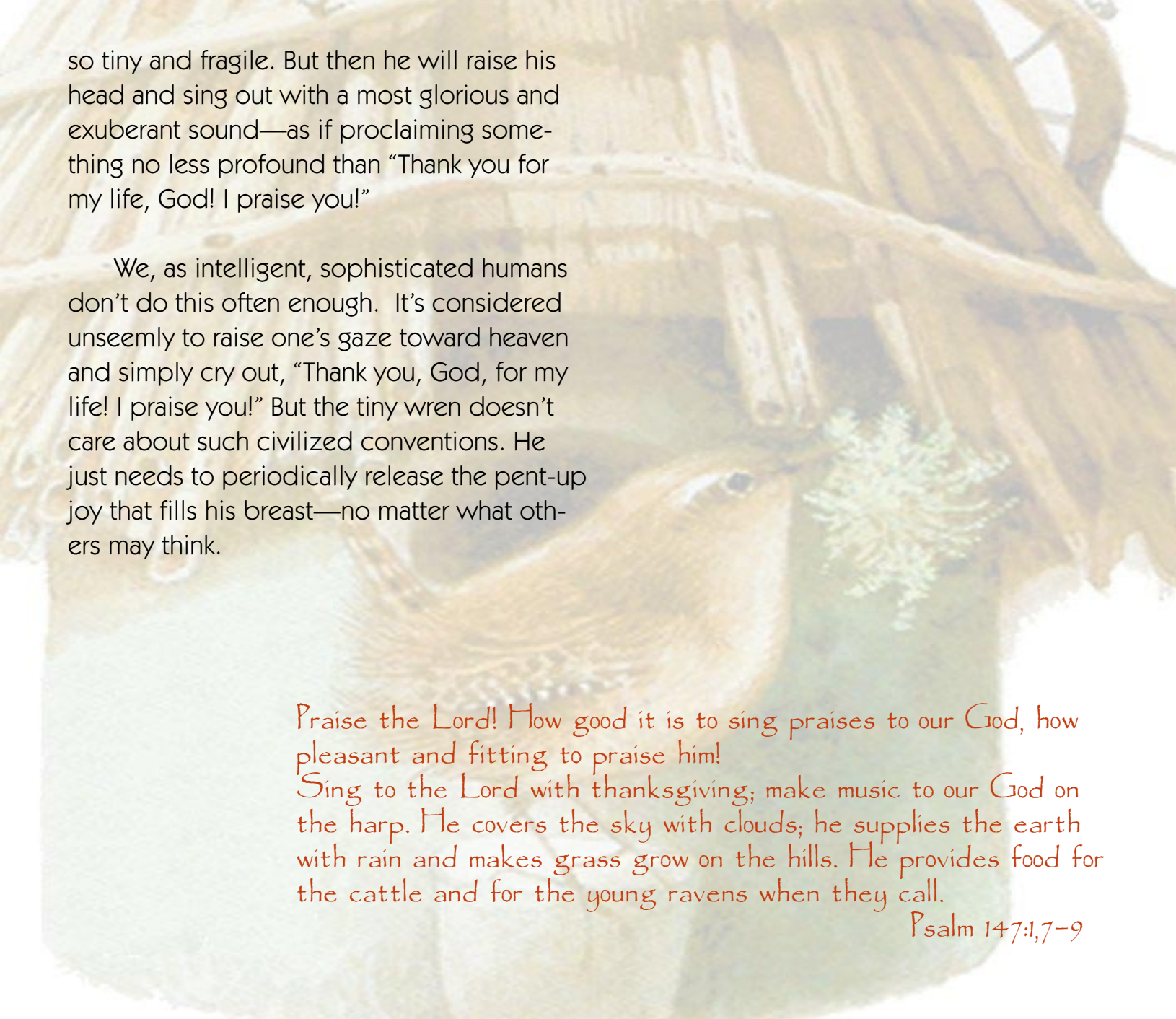
The male wren sets to collecting twigs and carrying them, one by one, through the small hole into the house. His purpose is single-minded, and identical to that of the male of every other species: to impress the female of the species.

During and after his construction project, he will periodically perch on a branch near the house, lift his tiny head skyward, and give forth with his clear, multi-faceted song. With a volume and clarity that bears no relation to his tiny size, the male

wren will give strong voice to his need for a mate. And, indeed, soon one will arrive. If she likes his nest—and likes him—she will favor the male with her company.

The wren is a feisty, charismatic bird who is fearless before any opposition. We have seen them run off blue jays and woodpeckers—birds many times their size—who have strayed too close to the house. We have also been recipients ourselves of their verbal chastisement, when we have been the ones encroaching on their territory.

But very often the tiny wren will have no apparent reason for his vocalization. Gazing out the library window between paragraphs, I'll quite often see the small gray bird alight on the step railing, looking

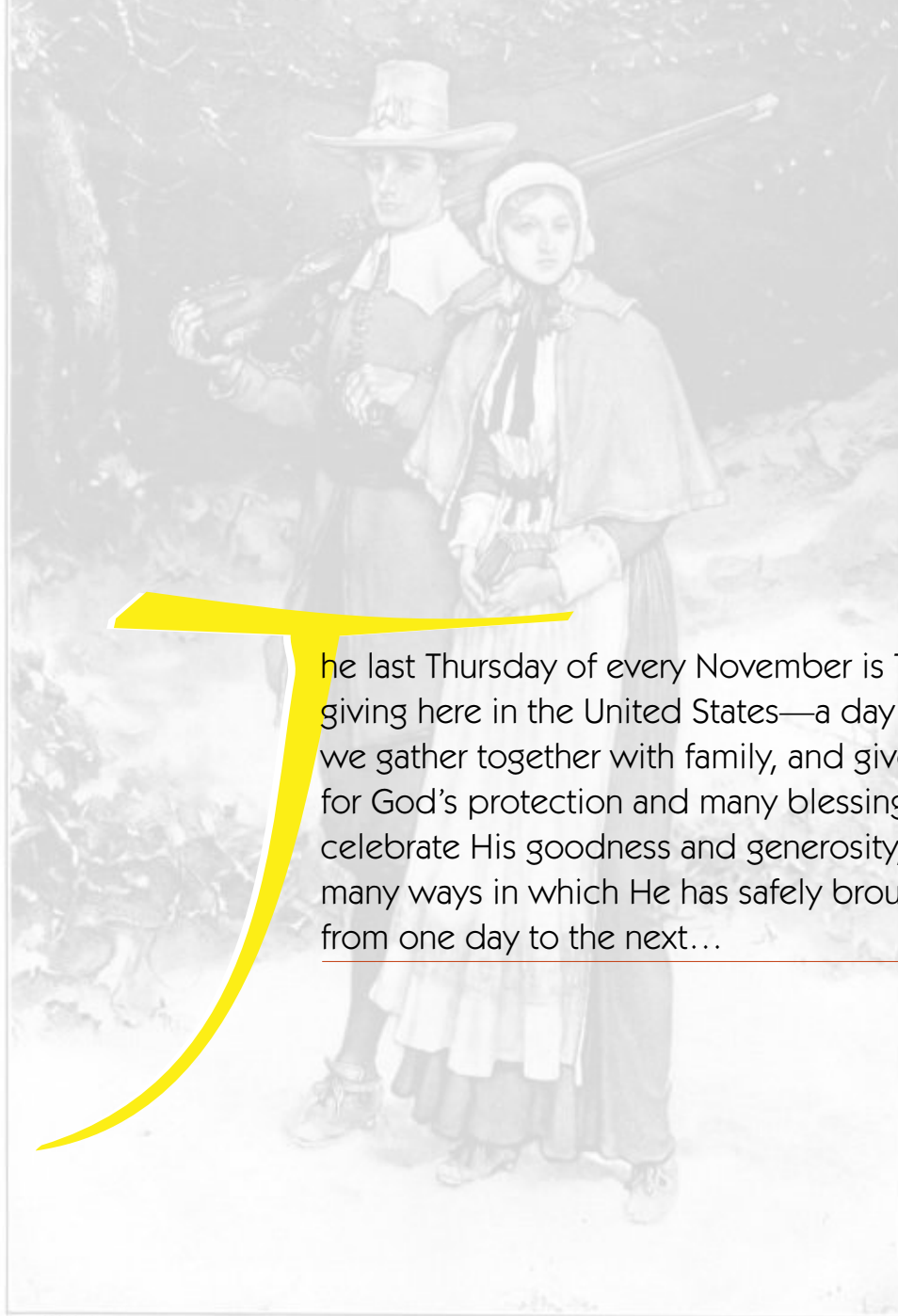
A small brown wren is perched on a branch of a tree. The tree has green moss growing on its branches. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and brown, suggesting a forest setting.

so tiny and fragile. But then he will raise his head and sing out with a most glorious and exuberant sound—as if proclaiming something no less profound than “Thank you for my life, God! I praise you!”

We, as intelligent, sophisticated humans don’t do this often enough. It’s considered unseemly to raise one’s gaze toward heaven and simply cry out, “Thank you, God, for my life! I praise you!” But the tiny wren doesn’t care about such civilized conventions. He just needs to periodically release the pent-up joy that fills his breast—no matter what others may think.

Praise the Lord! How good it is to sing praises to our God, how pleasant and fitting to praise him!
Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving; make music to our God on the harp. He covers the sky with clouds; he supplies the earth with rain and makes grass grow on the hills. He provides food for the cattle and for the young ravens when they call.

Psalm 147:1,7-9



The last Thursday of every November is Thanksgiving here in the United States—a day when we gather together with family, and give thanks for God’s protection and many blessings. We celebrate His goodness and generosity, and the many ways in which He has safely brought us from one day to the next...

Well, actually, Thanksgiving is a day when most Americans stuff themselves with too much food, then spend the rest of the day in a reclined position, staring glassy eyed at football games over their distended bellies.

As with most of our holidays, the real meaning behind the occasion has been set aside for the chance to take a day off from work, rest and recreate—and eat too much. So Easter becomes a day to buy a new dress and a new hat, Memorial Day becomes a day to celebrate the end of the school year, and Christmas becomes a day to buy things and receive gifts.

But then, we need not be thankful for the same things as our Pilgrim fathers to honor the spirit of the holiday.

In their first year, the settlers had lost almost half the people who had traveled to America on the Mayflower. Those who remained were thankful just to be alive. But they were also thankful that the recent harvest had been plentiful, that now they would not starve, and might survive to build their life and their families in this new land. Such considerations might seem foreign to a people who purchase the fixings for their Thanksgiving feast at the local supermarket—preprocessed, pre-packaged, and predigested.

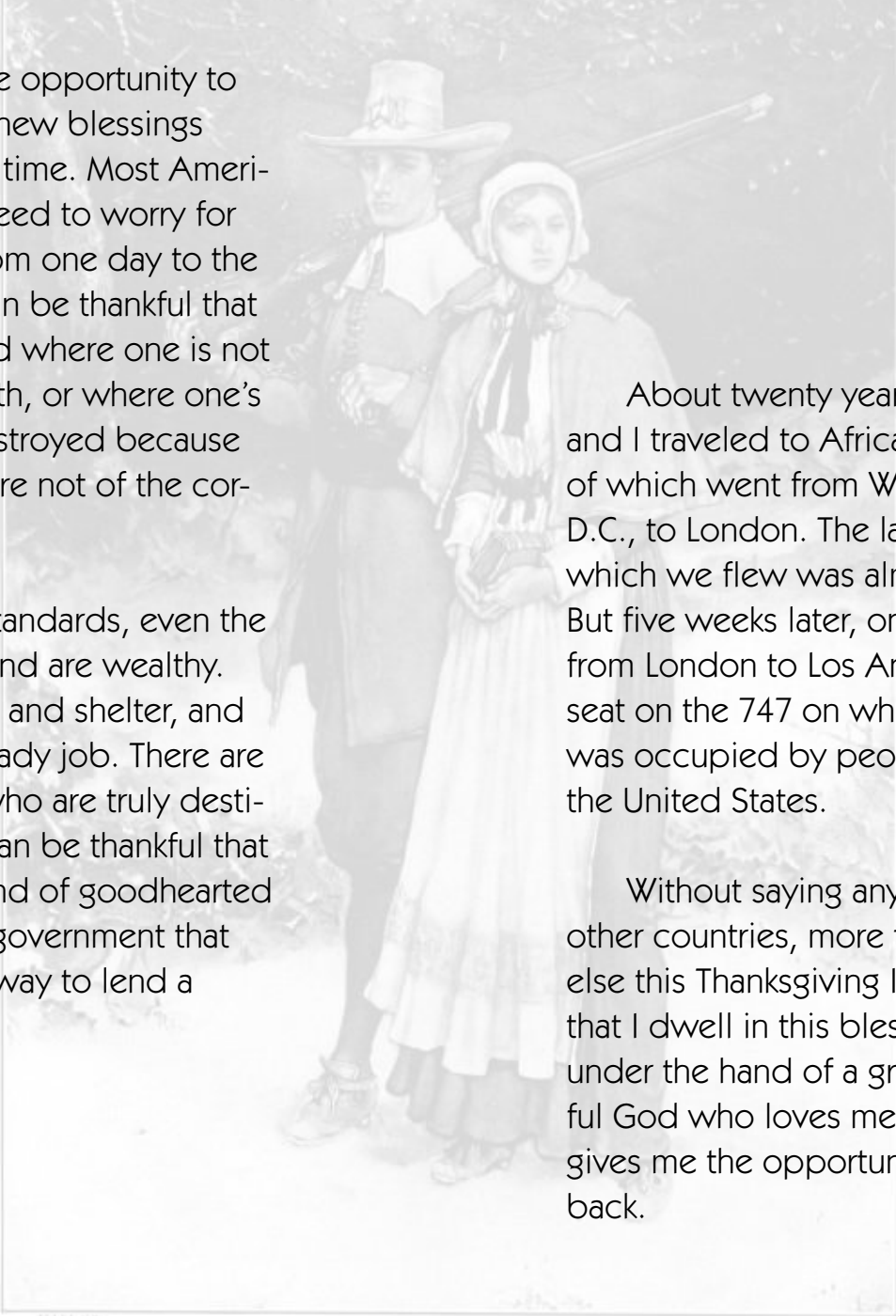
Thankful to be Alive

We have the opportunity to be thankful for new blessings during a newer time. Most Americans may not need to worry for their survival from one day to the next, but we can be thankful that we live in a land where one is not killed for his faith, or where one's home is not destroyed because its inhabitants are not of the correct tribe.

By global standards, even the "poor" in this land are wealthy. They have food and shelter, and very often a steady job. There are indeed some who are truly destitute, but they can be thankful that they live in a land of goodhearted people, and a government that goes out of its way to lend a hand.

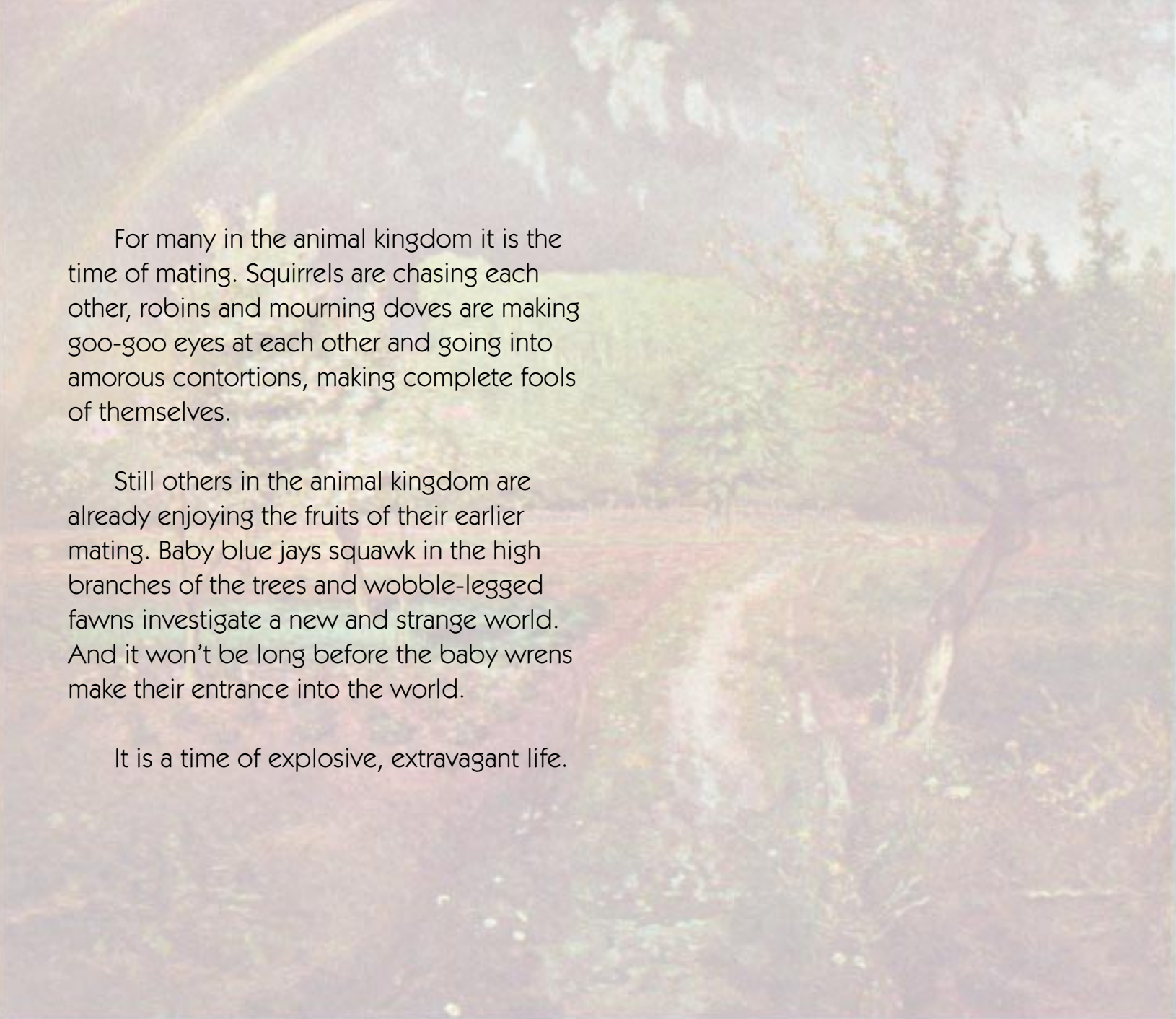
About twenty years ago, Linda and I traveled to Africa, the first leg of which went from Washington, D.C., to London. The large plane on which we flew was almost empty. But five weeks later, on the return trip from London to Los Angeles, every seat on the 747 on which we rode was occupied by people coming to the United States.

Without saying anything against other countries, more than anything else this Thanksgiving I am thankful that I dwell in this blessed land, and under the hand of a gracious, merciful God who loves me—and who gives me the opportunity to love Him back.



Life!

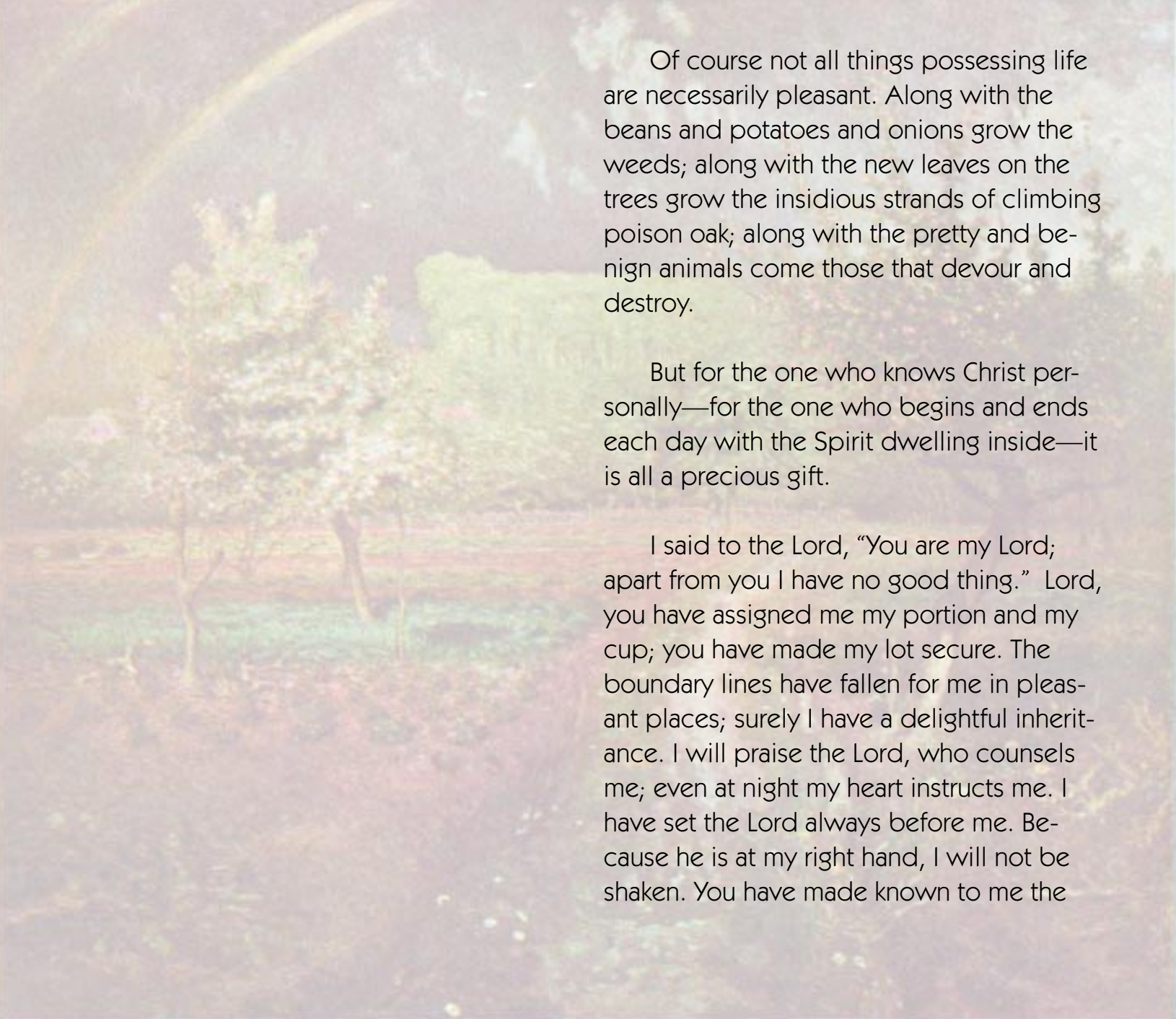
June is the month of burgeoning life. The tentative spring is just about past, and summer has just about arrived. Warm temperatures and humid air have joined to cause brown things to turn green and green things to grow profusely. The old winter picture of skeletal oak trees is far removed, and has been replaced by a dense green tapestry of new life.



For many in the animal kingdom it is the time of mating. Squirrels are chasing each other, robins and mourning doves are making goo-goo eyes at each other and going into amorous contortions, making complete fools of themselves.

Still others in the animal kingdom are already enjoying the fruits of their earlier mating. Baby blue jays squawk in the high branches of the trees and wobble-legged fawns investigate a new and strange world. And it won't be long before the baby wrens make their entrance into the world.

It is a time of explosive, extravagant life.



Of course not all things possessing life are necessarily pleasant. Along with the beans and potatoes and onions grow the weeds; along with the new leaves on the trees grow the insidious strands of climbing poison oak; along with the pretty and benign animals come those that devour and destroy.

But for the one who knows Christ personally—for the one who begins and ends each day with the Spirit dwelling inside—it is all a precious gift.

I said to the Lord, “You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.” Lord, you have assigned me my portion and my cup; you have made my lot secure. The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance. I will praise the Lord, who counsels me; even at night my heart instructs me. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. You have made known to me the

path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand. Psalm 16:2,5-8,11

Each day of life with Christ is just one more opportunity to praise His name. Every day with Him is simply another chance to shout up our songs of thanksgiving. We are filled with life!—His life!—and that life supplies everything we will ever need.

This life is not just breath, but the very wind of the Spirit; it is not just possessions, but bounty poured out of heaven's vast storehouses; it is not just health, but life everlasting. Life in Christ is life to its full.

How priceless is your unfailing love! Both high and low among men find refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house; you give them drink from your river of delights. For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.

Psalm 36:7-9

Joyful Thanksgiving

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