

SCOTT NOEL

Jan's Garden in July, 2018
Oil on canvas, 68 x 64 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST

JORY POST

Sweet Jesus

At one year old, the boy had not yet learned to crawl in what was considered to be the developmentally appropriate time frame. What his grandmother was always quick to add when the boy's parents showed concern about the perceived delay was that her grandson had not yet *chosen* to crawl. "It has nothing to do with ability or delay. It has everything to do with choice." Naturally though, the parents worried, because of the nurse who told them the umbilical cord had been briefly wrapped around the boy's neck at birth.

The boy would sit in the middle of the floor, in his crib, or in his high chair and though not facially expressive, would lift his head up to the ceiling, sideways toward the rays of sunlight shafting through the slits in the windows, raise his hand and turn his fingers, and watch the shadows roll. His parents would frown, his grandmother would smile and nod.

At two, the boy was crawling some, usually to find the splash of sunlight on the mahogany floor, but had not yet walked. While the parents flipped through their shelf of child development books, reading up on the definition and symptoms of autism, what it meant to be on the spectrum, the grandmother would sit on the floor next to the boy, her knee touching his, knitting a scarf or a sweater, and tell the parents, "When he needs to be somewhere that matters, he'll walk."

When he turned four, the parents were convinced, partly by their own fears and research and partly by their doctors, that the boy might be sensitive to gluten and casein, so they radically changed the family's eating habits. The grandmother nodded in approval of this development and often brought the family homemade dishes comprised wholly of high-nutrient plant-based ingredients, like the eggplant lasagna the boy loved and the chickpea muffins made with sunflower seeds and maca powder and just a taste of vanilla.

It was during one of the grandmother's home-cooked healthy meals that something changed in the boy. Up to this point, he had never spoken, not even a "ma" or a "pa." There had been an increasing variety of sounds—squeals at his dog, grunts when he couldn't pick up a piece of food, howls when he needed some attention—but no words. After three bites of butternut curry soup, he threw his hands up and placed them on top of his head and said, "That's good soup." His parents sat with lips wide in bewilderment. The