

they were regular, persistent, insistent. At first, he had been skeptical, until in subsequent days they would hear from the people who had been the focus of Linda's prayers that in fact they had felt Linda's presence during the times she had been praying for them. Grandma nodded.

More friends spoke, a brother-in-law, the sons, colleagues, more pastors. Hundreds of small bundles of Kleenex had been tossed underneath chairs throughout the hall, and hundreds of people bent over and picked them up, slid open the cellophane wrappers, wiped tears, blew noses.

The final speaker, the main pastor of the church, stepped to the podium and spent forty-five minutes speaking very little of Linda. He talked mostly about Jesus and His resurrection and how those who had taken Jesus into their hearts would resurrect with Him, would be joined together with Jesus and Linda and all their other loved ones, if they would only take Him into *their* hearts. And the pastor invited everyone in the audience who had not yet done so to do so now, to come up at the end of the memorial and join him.

Grandma smiled. *And we'll give you a two-visit pass for prime parking spots.*

When the pastor said, "Amen, please join us now for refreshments," and stepped away from the podium, the boy opened his eyes, not tired. Grandma took him by the hand and they walked to the lobby. Dozens of folks were uncovering dessert trays and fruit plates, pouring cups of coffee and sodas, encouraging folks to feed themselves, to rejoice. The boy let go of Grandma's hand and walked down the row of tables, looking at the foods his parents would never let him eat: chocolate chip cookies, pumpkin pie, lemon bars. At the far end, he saw a huge cake, covered in frosting. A woman in a red-checkered dress was putting slices on paper plates. He ran up to the table and watched her cut. Grandma stayed back.

"What is this?" asked the boy.

The woman reached with her free hand to rub his hair. She leaned down to bring her face closer to his. "This, my young man, is what I call Sweet Jesus. If you take one bite, you'll be hooked for life, know what God has in store for you."

"What's in it?"

"Well, it's actually a butterscotch roll-up cake. Do you know about butterscotch?"

The boy shook his head.

"Second best thing God put on this earth. Unsalted butter, dark brown sugar, heavy cream. Some vanilla, and a dash of salt, and just a touch of Labrot & Graham whiskey, but not enough to do anybody any harm."

Later at home, when being grilled by his parents about the memorial, he told them he had tasted Sweet Jesus. They were more upset about the ingredients of the butterscotch cake than they would have been if he had taken to religion.

The grandmother had told the parents the boy slept through the service. When the parents asked the boy, he said, "No. I was wide awake the whole time. I closed my eyes to get closer to Linda's soul. Those people are crazy, though. They think it's only about God and Jesus. It's way more."

Jory Post likes to play games, solve puzzles, and write in code. He plays pinochle with his family on Sunday nights, three-cushion billiards whenever he can find a table and a partner who loves the geometry and physics of cue balls on felt, Words with Friends and Scrabble online with his mom and friends, and poker, having taken first place in a World Series of Poker tournament at Harveys Lake Tahoe in 2004. Whether writing plays, short stories, poetry, unfinished novels, or grant proposals, Post relishes unraveling the mystery of word combinations that propel stories forward to their inevitable and surprising end points. He is the cofounder and managing editor of *phren-Z* online literary magazine and Santa Cruz Writes. His work has been published in *Chicago Quarterly Review*, *Porter Gulch Review*, *Epiphany*, and *Red Wheelbarrow*. As JoKa Press, he and his wife, Karen Wallace, create handmade books, assemblages, and other art projects that combine words with found and fabricated objects.

SCOTT NOEL

The Garden in June, 2018

Oil on canvas, 40 x 86 in



COURTESY THE ARTIST