

# The Book

Jean Janzen

**O**nion skin, they called those thin pages in our Bibles, translucent and strong. Finger smudge at the edges, pages shining over the layers that wait for understanding. After decades I taste them new, the onion sliced raw, tang of earth in my mouth.

Book of leaves, a tree in our house.  
My father brings it to the table.  
Before oatmeal and bread, the words  
like seeds drop down into a damp place.  
“The Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away,”  
Blessed be the leaves turning in his hand.

My children, bathed and fragrant, lean  
against my shoulders as I read.  
They listen to the Shepherd who calls  
to them, who walks the edge of a cliff.  
They smell the burning bush, huddle  
with me as the glory passes over,  
as I cover them with these paper wings.

The stories walk out the door with us—  
Joseph dreaming, Ruth gleaning,  
Jesus in a boat, Jesus wearing thorns.  
Sometimes he gazes like a lion,  
stares down the marble aisles  
of churches through glass angels,  
out to the ruins we have made.

One red satin ribbon marks the place,  
cord of God's desire for us  
sewn to the spine of the text.  
No matter where the scarlet falls,  
no matter which chapter or verse,  
it is relentless in pursuit, the prophets  
stumbling behind us, weeping  
and singing, the blind man seeing.

Veins in the leaves are traceries  
of Hebrew and Greek, hidden and sweet,  
stories from which we begin again.  
I smell roots and eat. "Blessed  
are those planted by the river."  
I will sleep in threads of silk,  
for I have eaten the Book,  
and one day will emerge with wet wings  
lifting toward the white lilies.

### Note

This poem is reprinted by permission of the poet.

### About the poet

Jean Janzen lives in Fresno, California, where she attends College Community Mennonite Brethren Church. Her latest collection of poems is *Paper House* (Good Books, 2008).