

The book

by [Jean Janzen](#) in the [March 24, 2009](#) issue

Onion 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.

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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.

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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.

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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.