

## Day Hike

Dew still glistening in the undergrowth, Brother Lewis and I trudge up the winding trail. Our morning legs carry us at a steady pace. In branches overhead, jays and squirrels chip-chap their tedious political argument. With nonpartisan ears, we listen to their chatter.

Our breathing grows labored as we ascend, stepping over roots and rocks, watching for snakes. Our pace slows. Twice we are surprised by does forging a new path to the creek. Now and then we break through gaps in the oaks and pause to watch the hawks circling the peak.

Oak gives way to pine. Buzzards patrol the ravine where a solitary horse whinnies. At one of the switchbacks, our view opens and the sky turns bright. The sun meanders across the afternoon sky, none too eager to arrive. Which saint was it who stared at the sun without going blind?

On the limestone tonsure at the top of the mountain, Brother Lewis and I sit on a bench overlooking the bay. We trade gulps from our water bottle. Lewis tugs at his cassock to cool his skin. His bare feet are caked with clay. A contemplative lizard tops the bench and shares our view.

In the distance, the bridge's long sweeping span, suspended between mighty towers, appears small. Beside it rises the city named for Francis, its famous skyline welcoming the evening sun like a prodigal sibling. And spread across the valley just beneath us: second-generation silicon geniuses.

The lizard completes his liturgy and scrambles into the weeds. *What are you feeling?* asks Brother Lewis. *Gratitude*, I reply. *Gratitude*, he echoes. I half ask, *Maybe we should pray?* Gazing over the fertile valley once named for Clare, Lewis says, *Isn't that what we've been doing all along?*

by David Denny