

In the receiving line after worship

by [Julie Pennington-Russell](#) in the [November 26, 2014](#) issue

In the receiving line after worship an elderly man
wants to tell me about his hydrangeas. They were
gorgeous last summer, he says, but not as splendid

as in 1972 when the blue ribbon at the state fair
went to his wife who, he reminds me, was Miss Butts
County back in the 1950s and whom he still misses

every day, especially when he eats peach jam on his toast
which is almost every morning except Tuesdays
when the VFW guys get together down at the café.

The people behind him in line shift on their feet
and glance at their watches while he, oblivious
to their impatience, goes on to describe for me (in detail)

the attributes of her winning Lemon Zest Mophead,
which he swears was the size of a dinner plate, or maybe
a large salad plate. The hydrangea story is taking forever

and I feel my own agitation rising, until the moment
I take his hand in mine (a gesture of care but also,
I regret now to say, meant to hurry him along) and I feel

his papery fingers which are not at all like a hydrangea
but rather like a maple leaf in November,
all that lush, green vigor stored deep within itself

just before it releases the limb and is airborne at last,
carried on a breath, caught up in the glory of all created
things, its final fluttering an ovation of praise.