An Indulgence

by Suzanne Underwood Rhodes in the February 2024 issue

It is impossible that the son of these tears should perish.
—St. Monica, mother of Augustine of Hippo

I use the wide knife blade
as he taught me to crush the garlic clove

and toss it in with vegetables and olive oil
letting my hands feel their skins and shapes

and slickness, the same hands that bathed
and oiled him when he was too small to stand,

as I bathe him now with tears in his fall
an ocean away and can't command them, running

stupidly into my bowl of squash and onions,
for tears are not of this world, nor do they heed

a mother's will to set things right, like setting the table
or making a grocery list, or saying, "Don't look back."

The past cruelly presses on us all,
but just now, at my granite counter,

let me savor the pungence
of one crushed clove.