

Chrism

by [Olga Hartwell](#) in the [March 2024](#) issue

Collection:

To harvest myrrh, go deep. Pierce
The bark, slice through to sapwood.
Resin will bleed, collect at the cut,
A fragrant, futile balm. Then wound again.

Use:

Of course, the man was dead. Too late,
Nicodemus brought his unbeautiful gift:
One hundred pounds of myrrh and aloe, bumped
Across town in a donkey cart. Lumbering

Back and forth, he carried the tribute in scoops,
Bore the ooze in leaky fingers, laid it down
On cold skin. Then, creaking to his knees
He spread it, rubbed it in. Again he rose

And fell, dripping wasted balm on dirt,
Pouring out healing for a corpse. The feet
Broke him. Iron had bled them together, stuck
In unnatural embrace. The nail ripped out,

They fell apart, wound torn from wound
In fresh violation. Ragged lips wept
Rust and pus. He turned for a linen cloth
But his vision blurred. Slowly, he crumbled,

Gave way to stinging lashes, broken knees,
Let fall an ever-living font of tears that
Washed away the crust, left the feet clean,
While Nicodemus, unlovely, longed to believe.