

Real Life

by [James Owens](#) in the [September 2024](#) issue

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(public domain)

The Sacrifice of Isaac, 1598

—Michelangelo Caravaggio

The painter has grabbed a butter knife from the nearest table and shoved it into his Abraham's hand, instructing, *Be this boy's father and cut him open*, though the street urchin who plays Isaac isn't afraid or very interested in being a prop.

The feathers of the angel's wings
look like fluffs of papier-mâché.
The ram is bored, maybe embarrassed,
like any sensible beast made to pose.

But Abraham's yearning question
that meets the angel's serene regard,
the search for the face of God
in the face of the messenger—
he would kill for this.