St. Cuthbert and the Otters

By Christine Valters Paintner

The saint stands immersed in the North Sea, his nightly vigil, waves lap his beard, offers prayers of wildness and wakefulness, the moon is a communion wafer floating across sky. He smiles as curious seals swim past, when dawn approaches, birds open their beaks in song, land on his shoulders.

Each morning he steps back onto shore with wrinkled toes, skin pale blue, two otters scurry over, warm him with fish-hued breath, wrap themselves around his frigid feet, until he can wiggle them again,

they beckon him to romp and frolic and in the midst of this otter-saint rumble-rumpus, lost in laughter, he forgets himself, forgets the many names of God, realizes this too is a kind of prayer.