



Wiregrass

2016 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



Cover art: **Love** - Amanda Bragg

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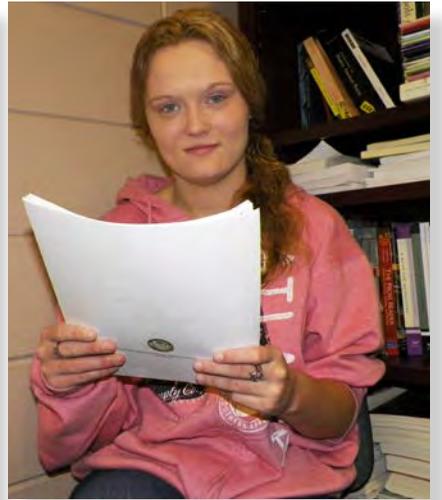
2016 LITERARY AND ARTS JOURNAL



East Georgia State College, University System of Georgia, Swainsboro, Georgia 30401
www.ega.edu

Wiregrass 2016 Literary and Arts Journal

Featuring the writing and artwork of East Georgia State College students, staff, and faculty.



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Thanks to Val Czerny, Desmal Purcell, and Alan Brasher

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Stealing Time

Time came to a standstill as Dylan saw the headlights line up with his own. He looked over at his wife, Amy, and caught the terror in her eyes right before she threw her hands over her face. He could no longer feel the car beneath him. The darkness outside cloaked everything so as not to give any hints of how fast he was headed for the other vehicle. At the last moment, he reached for his wife's shaking hands and looked at her once more. Then, the crash came.

Glass shattered in on him and sliced his hands and face. Amy's screams were cut short as she was thrown from her seat. Dylan felt his seatbelt cut into his stomach and throat. Pain seared in his head and blood covered his face and filled his nose and mouth. He fought with the seatbelt, tearing at it so he could escape the dust from the airbag filling his lungs. Finally, he was loose, and he crawled through the broken window. Dylan stood halfway up, immediately feeling his own brokenness, and turned in circles, searching for his wife through swollen eyes. When he found her, he stumbled to where Amy laid disfigured on the blacktop highway.

"Amy! Amy, wake up!" He sobbed into her bloody dress and screamed at the gathering bystanders to call for help, even though he knew it would be useless. The driver from the other vehicle, his drunkenness being the cause of the tragedy, was beating at his window and finally managed to break out just as his car began flaming. Dylan pulled Amy into his lap and rocked her. Her face was unrecognizable through the wounds the pavement had inflicted, but still he brushed her blood-matted hair from her forehead.

"My beautiful wife," he breathed. "I'm so sorry. Oh God, Amy, please don't go." He willed her to hear the words over the blaring sirens. Blue and red lights blinded him, and paramedics barreled towards where he sat hunched over his wife. Dylan clung to Amy's limp body and begged them not to take her away from him. Eventually they pried her out of his arms and left him sitting there as more paramedics gathered around him to tend to his injuries. Through bodies and blurry vision, he watched them lay Amy in a body bag, leaving it open just enough for him to still see her face.

Four paramedics loaded Dylan on a stretcher and pushed him into the ambulance. Immediately he was hooked up to various machines, and a mysterious calm fell over him. He laid still as a corpse and let the people work on him. Soon, they were rushing him through the ER doors and into a room with a curtain door. More machines and more people were

dragged into the small space. A doctor leaned over at one point and said something, probably comforting, to him, but he was deaf to everything happening around him. All he could think of was his wife lying in a cold room in one of a dozen freezers with a tag around her toe. His heart slowed and his vision became spotty. At last, he was asleep.

Dylan tossed and turned in the uncomfortable hospital bed. He desperately wanted to sleep, but crimson nightmares hit him like bullets every time he drifted off. He climbed out of the bed and walked over to the sink to refill his cup. He had a nagging feeling that someone was watching him, and when he glanced in the mirror above the sink, he saw his wife was the culprit. Then, she vanished as soon as she had appeared, and he thought he had imagined the whole thing. Dylan stopped for a moment, and then reached for the bag with the clean clothes his brother had brought a few days earlier. He shed the hospital gown and put them on. Leaving everything behind, he made his way out of the hospital and walked in the misty, morning air to find his wife.

He walked for what felt like hours, head down, hands in his pockets. When he looked up again he found himself outside of Amy's favorite antique shop. He had never been inside before because old, raggedy, used stuff didn't really appeal to him, but his wife stayed in there for hours at a time. He could almost see her on the other side of the glass door, begging him to come in so she could "show him all the cool stuff." This time he indulged her and walked in.

Instantly, he was enveloped in the smell of incense, and everything was cast in a dingy, yellow light. Knick-knacks filled every wall and every shelf in between. He paced the aisles and picked up things here and there and inspected them, just like he knew Amy would have done. Out of the corner of his eye he saw someone moving familiarly through the rows of shelves. He followed. Every corner he turned, the person was already turning the next. Long, blonde hair wisped behind the elusive being. He quickened his pace and furrowed his brow in frustration. He wanted to know who this woman was and why she was avoiding him.

Finally, he caught up with her in one of the store's many nooks. He slowed to a tiptoe pace so he wouldn't scare her away. He noticed that the woman was the same height as his late wife. As he inched closer, he saw that the hair hiding her face was the same shade of blonde that Amy's used to be. Then, he stood directly in front of her. His breathing stopped as he realized that this woman was his wife. He had actually found her. She looked up at him, not a scratch on her face, and he fell to his knees.

She smiled and held something out to him, a pocket watch. Dylan's entire body shook with tearless sobs as he reached for it. All he felt, though, was the cold chain fall across his palm. And then she was gone again. He scooted to the back wall of the nook and let his legs fall limp against the floor. He began to twist the knobs on the edge of the watch and the air around him changed. Suddenly he was in Langley Park, right outside of town, and Amy was sprawled on a blanket next to a past version of himself. This was the day he had proposed, and he quickly realized that he was reliving his own memory. Dylan watched Amy's face light up as he got on one knee, without a ring. He smiled at the scene in front of him, and despite the longing to stay and the grief wrenching his gut, he closed the pocket watch and left the antique shop.

He didn't walk back to the hospital. Instead, he went home. This walk was shorter than the one he'd taken earlier. He was thankful when he soon reached his front door and then his own bed. He fell into it and let the exhaustion of the last week flow through his body. Images flashed on the back of his eyelids: his wife's bright, green eyes shining like stars, her childlike laughter all around like a lullaby, telling him to sleep, and for the first time, the images were not of headlights and a mangled lover.

--Emily Weekley



Tybee Lighthouse - Karen Murphree



Morning Shadows - Jason Lee

The Ghost Dance

Imagine a ghost dance
For hunters who cannot hunt
Who burn sweet grass
And sing the old songs.

Put on the ghost shirt and dance.

Imagine a ghost dance
For those who find the world strange,
See nothing in an empty sky,
And hear nothing in the silent earth.

Imagine a ghost dance
For the young who drift like smoke,
For fires grown cold,
For songs not sung
And drums now stilled.

Put on a ghost shirt and dance.

Imagine a ghost dance
To keep the old ways safe
To feed the hungry
To stop the winter chill

Put on a ghost shirt and dance

Imagine a ghost shirt to keep us safe.
To heal our sick
To teach our young
To save the lost

Put on the ghost shirt and dance

Imagine a ghost dance
To keep our ways safe
To make the rivers run clear
To give us hope

Imagine a better world.

Imagine a ghost dance and dance.

— *Kenneth Homer*

Pitches

The thin, choir-boy falsetto fails to emote. But the story was told, before the song began, with the simplest of statements: “I know

the pitches.” Notation reduces melody to a series of pitches, but the magic falls between the notes, hiding in the push-pull of rising

and falling inflections. The science of music speaks of tone as pitch; the art reads tone as timbre. Choral training aims at accuracy, and the

skilled ear approves it. But beauty is not the work of skill or accuracy.

— *Alan Brasher*

Cinderella

I want to have a fairy godmother,
The one who makes my dreams come true.

I want to ride in a pumpkin coach,
My dress the perfect shade of blue.

I want to wear the elegant slippers,
The ones that are made of glass.

I want to arrive at the ball,
The one I thought I would never surpass.

I want to be greeted as one of your own,
The one that everyone loves.

I want you to dance with only me,
The one wearing the beautiful dress and gloves.

I want to be your Cinderella,
The one you ask to dance.

I want to be your fairy tale,
The story of love and romance.

I want to be your Princess,
Upon a throne that's built for two.

I want to be the missing piece,
The one that fits the shoe.

I want to believe in happily ever after,
The one who gets her prince.

I want to look back on the day we met,
The day where our love commenced

— *Hollie Barton*

Like Butter

The best approach is to wait by the toaster, stare deep into the slots so that you are hypnotized by the concealed heat's blaze, hidden between the profile of metal and bread—it is time to focus. You know when it comes, but you'll always jerk when the toaster finales. Please ensure that you move quickly, even though the bread is hot—grab it. Spread the butter first, warranting that it welds into the bread as if to give it a glossed primer. Although creamy is advertised, peanut butter does not spread with grace, for it is thick and stern. The perfect stroke is essential when you apply peanut butter. Tough penetration, even the slightest, can compromise the slice. Do not leave any edges exposed.

The house I live in is the melting pot of misplaced relatives. Immediate family or not, he must pull his weight here. It is often that he is eager to overachieve when dues are to be paid in the house. The above recipe is an approach that he is the pioneer of. However, when he makes toast, it is especially with me. There is a ritual in his approach—this doctrine I have observed for years. Since I can remember, this technique has been a family tradition sacred between him and myself.

We eat peanut butter with butter on toast because you can feel its thick coat lying on the lining of your stomach. This sensation provides a warmth in your core, weighing heavily on your back as if the melted butter has physically smeared itself over your vessel. The sensation lingers there. Sometimes it is the only thing I know that is left putting on my gut, for I don't know where the last meal has gone or when the next will come.

Peanut butter on buttered toast is his favorite item to consume; the peanut butter leaves a taste on his tongue that allows him the silent glory in producing such a succulent snack. He is a refined chef, and there is an invisible trophy that lines the pit of his gut. For him, this is mastery to gloat upon and release his excitement after the devouring of his food.

At times he'd ask with elegance, "Do you want to lick the knife?" pressing the tip of it flush with my lips. I could taste the metal. The butter could never pierce through my stoic mouth, but I could feel the thickness of its squish try to penetrate through my teeth, altered, for until then I have only been taught to eat from spoons.

Gently he reassured my discomfort. "I will teach you... I'll do it first, and then you can."

Like that of a fresh house-trained dog salivating over a treat, his wet tongue gently licked the fruits of his labor with precision as he studied the blade, careful not to cut himself. Proud of his achievement, he eyed the blade, then me—to display the ease of the task.

The responsibility I have assisting in the making of toast has grown with my existence. I can use the knife on my own now that he has taught me well. The thickness of the salty peanut butter penetrates my mouth with ease at this point; the squish combats the cold metal erect between my cheeks. He still goes first sometimes, sampling his own product, to eat the fruits of his labor as a chef-- but not always. This has become a task so smooth for us, like the spread of butter on your morning toast to get the day started. He partakes of coffee with his toast, but little girls my age cannot because it will stunt our growth.

I stand around three-foot-five inches, my skin polished with a light layer of gold, as if I were dipped in butter, hair coarse as wool. I am not like the other girls my age who need the television on; most times I find comfort staring at the red light that beams on the bottom right corner of the television frame—reminding me that it is off. He is very precise about when toast it to be made and consumed. Most people eat their toast in the morning, just as we do, when dark teases day, knowing it has hours before the sun's desolation.

At around 0217 there is a feeling in the depths of my gut that I find daunting; my body waits for toast, but I try to find methods to disregard it. This famished sensation defiantly eliminates any ability to sleep or find comfort. The head of my bed is obverse of my bedroom window. On a good California night, sirens aren't the malady that rocks me to sleep. Birds of Paradise walk alongside the pathway on the side of the house, peeking through my window, tenacious as they watch. When the moon is bright, it pierces through the sheet that hangs in lieu of curtains; its radiance mantles my small silhouette; the luminescent moon crawls down my flesh and makes an abrupt stop at my waist. I lay on my side, facing the panorama of my room. Surrounded by relics of my past: a broken tea set, dolls—some naked—some clothed, and lastly books-- more books, and some puzzles.

The school says I am dyslexic, but I had no desire to read. She didn't ask the right questions. They say she was a doctor, but she didn't have a stethoscope or any metal object in her office. She had a pretty lamp and a bamboo tree. I was confused, so I didn't speak.

"Your daughter is distracted," teachers and providers seem to say in harmony.

Most of the books have been read to me by him; he says I can't read well enough by myself yet—but when he is not around I read them. Most of the books we read are about black families overcoming hardship, or little black girls going through adventures. I like those books. Mom says there are no tragic mulattos allowed in the melting pot I call home.

It's 0220. The thought of morning toast erects his senses and teases his palate. He stands five-foot-seven inches tall coated in bronze skin, short wool hair like that of a trimmed lamb. He has laborless hands that could sooth the most colic of infants. He does not make his morning toast alone; I am always invited. The length of his silhouette seems to be taller when his taut body waits over my bed. No need for a verbal gesture, for his body has told me the time, his breathing heavy and raspy. The moonlight dims, faded by his presence. The Birds of Paradise have the best view now. This morning he cuts the slice of bread, parting it down the middle. You could see the butter melted in between, its parts shielded by the peanut butter, still cohesive, however, separating sparingly.

My approach is to wait and watch at the blazed inferno, turn the limber bread crisp and firm. Although I know it's coming, the process is subtle, but I still convulse. My bones long for other nutrition, but this is the one I am accustomed to—the spread of slick butter priming hot toast for the application of thick peanut butter. Knife in hand, he uses the most elusive stroke to make sure the bread stays in its purest form. It leaves a fullness that suspends in the pit of my abdomen. I only wait for the next slice to come.

— *Sequoia Sinclair*



No Lies, Just Love - Kevin Higgins

Uncharted Enjambment

Seventeen rods,
Sixty degrees,
The veins at magnetic north —
Running the lines straight and true, to
The stone wall —
oak —
thenceforth

Along the water course
Meandering straight,
Walking the bounds of the heat —
Minutes of latitude, Gunter-timed,
The chain crew's one heartbeat

Marking the pace,
The furlong dry,
Waves' threats restlessly nearing —
Carving out systems, establishing corners,
Each mete, the compass bearing

A clear direction,
A shot without pause,
An oxgang for each season —
Fifteen acres, twelve hundred leagues,
Each course with its needed degrees on

Cartes and log books,
Linen and plates,
Engraved with permanence, claiming
Every mosquito, each outpouring mouth —
Pinning locations and naming

Places with people,
Donors and lords,
Fairfaxes, Smiths, Rockefellers
Weakening landscapes with no formal crests —
Would-be sojourners setting as dwellers

Of villages, townships,
Boroughs and Boards,
Ridges' vales painted as trade routes —
Each innocent claimed by the Company's logic,
Brackish living encouraged and laid out

As a boon to existence,
A cure for all ills,
The promise of life in the making —
Life as a unit of debt in the waste-book,
The merchants, most cheerful, partaking

In the fruits of their efforts
Made bitter by profit,
Indigestion colors their grinning —
Above them, the lawmen look down from their
perches,
Bobbing, strutting, and cooing, "We're winning

The game since we've written the rules!"
A hawk, swooping by,
Hears the gloating —
And thinks, "How absurd! If they'd look to the sky,
They'd see plainly that soaring and floating

Along has not been
Completely abolished,
Each wing knows the open air's urging —
And the sea, down below, with its ebb and its flow,
At the moon's call never stops surging."

So the hawk makes its point
In an echoing cry
That resonates through to the spirit —
And we mapmakers may, if we're willing to try,
Lift our heads, hear the cry, and not fear it,

While it sails, dips, and drops
Through uncomfortable heights
Where our ears strain in efforts to catch it —
For maybe the key to the door has not worked
Since we've spent dear time trying to latch it.

Seventeen rods,
Sixty degrees,
The veins slip away from perfection —
Running the lines, not sure of the view,
I soar sunk in —
expansive —
direction.

— *Val Czerny*



Encompassing Resonance - Val Czerny



Untitled - Celeste Rodriguez Teran



Untitled - Jessica McVay

Another Generation

Slam!!

As I sit here on the couch after my long day,
My mind thinks of the pressures of today.
As my daily dose of caffeine wears off,
My mind travels all aloft
To the past, long ago. I know
My age, it does begin to show.
"I wonder if I have it," says I.
I let out with an incredible sigh.
I leave to go into my basement.
What I find there fills me with amazement.
"It's still here," I cry.
With how I feel, I could just fly.
I get the small box out of there,
Being careful not to breathe the air.
I put it near my dvd and brush it off.
As the dust flies, I nearly cough.
My old NES, sitting there, gray and true,
(Hopefully it still works with all the dust it's accrued).
I grab the box that has my games,
Put it all together, and hope for no flames.
At last, I see it, like it once was.
When I get it together, I just have to applaud.
Look, there's Mario, my old friend,
Searching for Bowzer until the very end.
And Link looking for Zelda, far and wide,
Cutting down enemies with the sword at his side
And Samus, Ice Climbers, and Simon Belmont too,
With Kirby, Duck Hunt, and the Bomber Blue.
My mind remembers the old cheats codes,
All the small ways to cheat on Nes; there were loads.

I remember a simpler time
Before my life had left its prime.
I don't know how many hours go by.
The light changes a lot outside.
All of them, all these old memories
I begin to think, "Why did I hide these?"
My son then comes home from school.
For one so young, he is no fool.
"Dad, what's that?" he asks.
"Well, my son, it's something from my past.
I used to play this for hours on end.
I would play together with my friends.
Let me show you how much fun it is."
I gave him a controller; it is his.
We play and laugh throughout the night,
Another generation playing, and playing all right.

— *Nathanael Lambert*

Kings and Queens

The Queen of Clovers was a fine young woman,
Her beauty envied by peasant girls.
Her long, flowing hair cascades when she's by her man,
Who is also a king of another country with diamond swirls.
Until the day another queen took her man, and in vain,
She forever locks herself in her room.
Her beauty and cascading hair forever down the drain,
She slowly wishes for the Queen of Hearts' impending doom.

The King of Diamonds was a handsome, passionate man,
Who wanted nothing but his lover by his side.
His judgment and look implied he was going for lifting the Wonderland ban.
Some say this side of him very soon died.
The Queen of Hearts changed him by her beauty and charm,
Turning him cold and loving only himself.
He brought his kingdom and pretty girls harm,
And left his Queen of Clovers on the shelf.

The King of Clubs was a jolly, fat old man,
With a thunderous voice that could blow you down.
His kingdom always partied day and night, hosted by a talking toucan.
People left the parties without a frown.
Rumor spread that after changing the Diamond King,
The Queen of Hearts came over to dine.
She did not stay long, and left, giving forks and plates a fling
The reason for this: she'd had a little too much wine.

The Queen of Hearts was a beautiful, intelligent lady,
With power and charm in her hand.
But she was no angel; she was devilishly shady,
She had every comfort and her chalice full of her wine-vodka blend.
She ruined the lives of royalty and the lives of peasants with her poisonous darts.
She got rid of every single girl or boy dubbed as 'Alice'.
To project her reign and continue to be the Queen of Hearts,
She made sure the real queen would never get her golden chalice.

Residents of the land came from the real world,
To fill in as a Hatter or a Cheshire cat.
Tweedledee and Tweedledum and the Dodo unfurled.
It did not matter if they were thin or fat.
When the true person fulfills the role and character,
He or she could return to Wonderland whenever they want.
If Wonderland finds the one, they receive a letter,
And it whisks them back into their role and costume flaunt.

Wonderland looks into the world through the looking glass,
In search of the true Queen of Hearts.
The search is usually fruitless to find a certain lass,
And end the reign of the poison darts.
But one day, a poor girl is taken into Wonderland
She filled up the 'Alice' role.
Residents hope she can wield the heart chalice in her hand,
But if we told you if she did, then it would be so dull.

— *Kori Rogers*



Macro Flowers - Amanda Bragg

Cassandra at the Statue of Athena

Cassandra grasped the cold patina leg,
and though she called upon infinity,
the best help she could pray for was revenge.
And so she learned it vanity to beg;
it is the nature of divinity
not to defend, but rather to avenge.

— *Armond Boudreaux*

Beautiful Perception

The connection of two people,
A feeling so wonderful we often can't control ourselves.
Sometimes we control ourselves too much.
Physical, mental and emotional satisfaction all in one,
All five senses heightened to the point where the world is just better,
A natural painkiller,
An act that creates beauty in more ways than one,
Soothing pain,
Giving love,
Creating life from lives,
Taking us to high places.
The one thing that everyone knows about but views differently.
The one thing that can be so beautiful and bring so much pain to a person:
Perception

— *Taneque Lewis*



Untitled - Nando Gaines



Untitled - Desmal Purcell

Good Ones Go

Oh why oh why must they depart?
As soon as shit goes haywire, their love is gone with the wind.
Might as well forget about repenting one's sin.
The soul will burn and rivers of tears will flow,
Constantly waiting for his feelings to blow,
So that this good woman doesn't permanently go.
When last fall was smooth sailing, how is he supposed to know
That this union will someday end?
Should make a man think, why bother fighting
In order to maintain the unique bond they had.
It's understandable the woman in question has a past,
Yet that should be left in the past.
No logical way to press rewind.
I'm more than willing to lend you a hand, if you wanted mine,
Be the shoulder you could cry on,
Comfort you when it feels all hope is gone,
Massage your soft brown skin if needed,
Talk for hours on end about our uncertain future.
I truly miss those late night conversations.
I admit, I was being childish at times.
Wish I could take it back;
However, we should forgive each other and try to work this out
Because we were made to be together,
And regardless of what you say, we're equally compatible with one another.
Our connection runs deeper than the ocean.
My life would feel empty without your presence,
Beautiful smile, gentle soul, and elegant grace,
Please take these words into consideration,
And come back to me because we still have a foundation.
Much love and peace, always.

— *Maurice Greening*



Drake - Toriana Mack



Jhana Aiko - Toriana Mack

The following is an excerpt from an unpublished fantasy novel called Animus: Little Gods, by Armond Boudreaux.

Ansela

Ansela had learned to be fast; she had to be in order to survive Sandersville.

She ran along the mezzanine floor of the armory, keeping close to the outer wall and ducking when she passed the big windows to avoid casting a shadow on the lower floor. She kept her eyes on the people below—especially on the big man who sat atop five large crates stacked in a pyramid shape—to make sure that no one looked up and saw her scrambling in the dark.

She had waited until she heard the noise of a dogfight before she had climbed down from the roof to the shattered window in the northeast corner. The Hollow Men spent most of their time training feral dogs and betting on the dogs in fights and using women as prizes. The fights happened several times a week, and even across the city from the armory, Ansela always knew when there was a dogfight because of the barking and screaming.

Ansela had learned to skin and butcher an animal down on the lower floor of the armory. Her father, Ansel, had taught her. They would hang big animals like deer and hogs from hooks that someone had put on the back of one of the parked Dragonflies—hoverplanes with four black folding wings like the insect's—and let the blood fall into a small channel that crossed the armory to a drain in the middle of the floor. Ansela had cleaned several deer with her father's help and a few smaller animals like squirrels and rabbits on her own.

The noise covered the sound of her feet on the metal floor, but she had still taken off her boots and left them on the roof. Sometimes she stepped on a rock or a loose bolt, but these barely barefoot over rough ground, and the soles of her feet were hard.

The eyes of the big man on the wooden pyramid rose to the mezzanine on the other side of the building, so Ansela stopped and crouched next to the wall. The building was about a hundred yards long and twenty-five or thirty yards wide, and she had crossed two thirds the length of it from the window where she had entered in the northwest corner. From here she could see her goal at the southwest corner: the opening of a metal chute that went from the mezzanine to a large metal bin on the bottom level.

She lay flat on the floor and eased over to the edge of the mezzanine until she could just peek over the side and see the face of the big man. That was the leader of the Hollow Men; she thought that people called him "Burl." He wore ripped pants, but no shoes or shirt, and even though his chest, arms, and shoulders swelled with muscle, his soft belly hung over the front

of his pants. He had no hair on his head or body that she could see except for his beard, which started halfway up his cheeks and hung down to the same level as his nipples. The light of several barrel-fires encircling his pyramid reflected from his bald head.

She tried to read his thoughts, closing her eyes and leaning her mind (that was the way she thought of it: leaning) toward him, but she could see little there except a glimmer of red light in the darkness. She rarely saw anything in any of their minds except darkness. That was why she called them the Hollow Men.

When she was very young she was afraid of the dark, but her mother had taught her not to fear it because it was nothing. The darkness couldn't really be a bad thing because it wasn't really bad.

Burl's eyes had almost drifted to where Ansela lay watching when the dogs suddenly stopped barking and two women screamed. Burl's gaze fell to the floor at the northern end of the building. Ansela turned to look, too. In the middle of the warehouse stood a large, chain-link kennel between eight parked Dragonflies. That was where they fought the dogs. Ansela couldn't see into the kennel for the crowd, but she could see two men pulling the screaming women away from the crowd toward the darkness at the far end of the building. Ansela wished she knew of a way to help them.

Watching Burl, Ansela crept along the mezzanine on her hands and knees, ready to drop if he glanced up. She wished that she had something to shoot him with—a crossbow, maybe—for what he and his men had done to Sandersville and for what his men were going to do to that woman.

The Hollow Men had come into the city three months or so ago like a February storm and killed or rounded up most of the survivors living in a group at the train yards and the Homeland Security station. They had set up their own camp in the armory, where they held their women, all the food in the city, and all the weapons that they could get their hands on. Nobody could get the Dragonflies running, and all the guns were too rusty to fire, but they had bows and plenty of blades: machetes, axes, knives, even a few swords.

A shirtless man wearing a leather harness that held a rifle and a pair of machetes approached Burl's crate-pyramid and spoke something to Burl that Ansela couldn't understand.

Now was her chance. Most of the Hollow Men were occupied with the aftermath of the dogfight, and hurried along the wall the rest of the way to the chute.

When she got to the corner of the mezzanine, she lay flat and looked over the edge at the floor below. They had put an extra guard by the food. Two men sat on crates looking toward the north end of the armory. One of them had an axe propped next to him, head-down, while the other had a black compound bow by his side. She'd have to move quick and get the preserved rations while the crowd was still noisy.

She crept over to the chute, a black hole in the wall about three feet wide and four feet high, and climbed in. The noise of the crowd got louder suddenly. Some of the men were fighting among themselves now, probably disagreeing about whose dogs would compete next. Pressing against the sides of the chute with her hands and feet, Ansela descended into the dark. The chute went straight down for about four feet until it turned and angled down for about twelve feet to another four-foot vertical shaft. Then it angled again to an opening behind a large crate on the lower floor.

Ansela reached the first turn and then slid on her butt down the long, angled section of chute. Then she crept like a spider down the second vertical section. Here the yells of the crowd, the screams of women, and the noise of dogs sounded muffled and far-off.

At the bottom of the vertical section, she sat down and slid her bag from her back. Slowly she unzipped it at the top so that it would be ready for the preserved rations. Firelight shone orange and yellow up the shaft. She took a breath. She had done this dozens of times in the last few months, and she could do it again. She'd slip in, take what food she could reach without see her.

She had just slid one strap of the bag over her shoulder when movement from below her made her stomach lurch. Someone appeared at the bottom of the shaft, silhouetted by the firelight. The figure moved up the chute easily, pressing its hands and feet to the sides just as Ansela did.

As quietly as she could, she slipped her arm through the other strap of the bag and turned to climb the chute. She could reach the top before the figure got to where she was now. He hadn't seen her yet.

But when Ansela took one last glance before she climbed, the figure had stopped about halfway up the shaft. She could barely make out a pair of eyes on a shadowed face. She was caught. Now she had to move. She scrambled up the vertical shaft to the the angled section of the chute, waiting for her pursuer to yell for the others, but she heard no sounds except for the dogfight and her own hands and feet slipping on metal. When she reached the angled shaft, she glanced back down to the turn below her. The figure's shadow appeared first, and then the

figure itself, moving terribly fast on its hands and feet. This was someone who spent a lot of time moving like an animal.

She hurried up the angled shaft to the last vertical section, and this time she didn't bother to look back. Her breath short and her heart racing, she climbed the chute and reached for the bottom of the opening, but her fingers slipped. As she fell, she thought of the dogs that would fight to decide which Hollow Man would have her, and of the things that the Hollow Men might do to her. When she hit the angled shaft, the noise seemed loud enough to shake the whole out. But then she heard her pursuer's feet and hands on the sides of the chute and a whispering voice that hissed, "Wait!"

Her mind began to retreat into itself, and she froze. Not now, she thought. Not. Now.

She forced herself to move, in her mind repeating the list her mother had taught her: Ansel and Martha, Isaiah and Angelique, Ansel and Judith, Mary and Mark.

"You got to remember those names," her mother had always told her. "If you forget, then they'll be gone when Papa and me die. There ain't no books to remember them."

Without looking down the angled section, she got to her feet and scrambled up the last shaft. She fell head-first out of the opening onto the mezzanine floor, rolled, and then ran, almost losing her balance and tumbling over the edge. Below, the noise of the crowd had changed: it was still loud, but the sound was directed toward her now, and she could make out some of the words: "thief," "kill," "girl," "mine," "shoot."

Arrows whistled as she ran, some of them passing close enough that she felt the wind from their feathers on her skin. A few of them bounced and twirled, two of their heads grazing her and cutting her face. Her speed might not save her now. One of them would hit her, and then they would leave her body to rot, or feed her to the dogs. Or were the Hollow Men cannibals?

She reached the window and jumped onto the ledge, groping wildly for the section of pipe that she used as a hold. This was where she would die. Standing on the ledge right here, she was the perfect target. She found the pipe and hung onto it, letting her feet dangle and inching toward the corner of the building. An arrow flew past her into the night sky. She was hanging from the pipe with her back against the wall, her bag between her back and the building, and in swung herself around to face the building. She found her footholds and crept around the corner to the east side of the building, where there were two more pipes that ran parallel to this one. She used these to climb up and grab hold of the roof edge.

The voices of men yelling echoed in the night. She pulled herself over the edge of the roof and got to her feet. She grabbed her boots and stuffed them in her bag before she ran toward the west side of the building where a catwalk connected the armory to a brick office building. When she reached the other side of the catwalk, she glanced back. The dark figure was on top of the armory.

Ansela ran, her heart pounding. If they caught her, she would kill herself. She had the switchblade that her mother had given her, and she had the courage to use it. Just draw the blade across her throat quickly and it would all be over. They might feed her to their pets, but the Hollow Men would never gamble for her in a dogfight.

She climbed down a pipe at the northeast corner of the brick building into an alley and ran toward the north. Here she would normally have gone south, but she couldn't lead her pursuer to the office building where she had been sleeping since the Hollow Men came. She couldn't give up that spot yet.

At the end of the alley she came to a street that led across the train yard to the main road into town. From here she could take the street and cross the road into the woods, or she could cross the train tracks and go to the river. She could hide there on one of the half-sunken boats.

Noise behind her. Her pursuer was climbing down the pipe into the alley. The woods on the other side of the tracks—she'd have to lose him that way. She started down the street toward the train sheds and make her pursuer think that she had headed for the river, and then she could run behind the sheds to the main road and into the trees.

"There's the little shit!"

The voice had come from somewhere close to the armory. Ansela glanced over her shoulder. Three men were running down one stretch of track, blades in their hands.

She ran behind the sheds and turned toward the main road. Back here the grass grew as high as she stood. Insects scattered all around her, flying in her face and biting her neck. She'd be lucky not to step on a snake in this brush. She could hear the footsteps of the men behind her. She was fast, but so were they.

In the back of one shed she spotted a door standing open and barely hanging from its hinges. She could slip through there to the other side and then make a run for it back to the south, using the train cars to hide her until she came to the end of the sheds. If she could trick the Hollow Men into thinking she'd gone through the woods to the east, then she might be able to make it to the river and wait it out on one of the boats until they all gave up on her.

She darted through the door into almost complete darkness and knew immediately that she had made a mistake. This wasn't a train stall. It was some kind of storage room, and she couldn't see an exit on the front side. But it was too late to run back out the way she had come. She could hear the men just a few yards from the door.

Wildly, she felt her way in the blackness toward the other side of the room, stumbling over pieces of metal and boxes on the floor and knocking her head on a set of metal shelves. She the switchblade. This was it.

I'm coming, Papa, she thought. I'm coming to where you are, I'm going to look you in the eyes, and I'm tell you that you were right. You should have done this yourself.

From her hiding place she could see dim starlight shining through the door and the three black shapes that came into the room.

"Come on out," said one of them. His voice sounded soft and higher-pitched than she had expected. "Just make this easy on all of us. There ain't no need in you starving. You come live with us and we'll treat you right. I'll be sweet to you. It'll be a lot better than out there on your own."

Ansela took the knife from her pocket and fingered the button. She rose up slowly from her crouched position. They wouldn't be able to see her, anyway. She pressed the button with her thumb and used her other hand to ease the blade out instead of letting it spring open. If one of them got close enough, she could stab him. Maybe she could get out of this, after all. And if not, she could at least kill one or two of them before she cut her own throat.

"Come on," said one of the other men. He was closer than she had expected. She felt her mind wanting to turn back in on itself again, but she resisted. She had to function now. She held her breath and jabbed thin air with the knife.

The man laughed. "I've got her right here. Come on, honey. Don't make this hard."

In the dark of his mind she saw what he planned to do to her when he caught her, and she nearly vomited.

"I've got something for—" the man with the high voice said, but he was cut off by the growl of an animal and a scream from near the door. A tearing sound and a thump. Had one of their dogs come after them?

“Mercer?” said the man nearest to Ansela. “Charlie? What is that?” That was enough to tell her where he was. She jabbed the knife again and felt the blade slip into his belly. He let out a low breath, almost a sigh. His hands groped in the dark, one of them finding her left arm and gripping it tight. She jabbed him again two more times, higher now, driving the blade as deep as she could.

“Help,” his voice gurgled.

More growls filled the room, and the third man screamed.

—*Armond Boudreaux*



Untitled - Gabby Moore



Morning Mist - Tabithia Ross

The Fourteenth Annual Emily Pestana-Mason Memorial Poetry Contest



The judge for this year's contest is Chris Mattingly who holds an M.F.A. in Poetry from Spalding

University. He teaches interdisciplinary courses on punk rock and gritty American literature at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. His book of poems, Scuffletown, is available for checkout from the East Georgia State College Library. From 2012-2014, Chris served as a Humanities faculty member at ECSC.

FIRST PLACE POEM

This poem haunted me. Meaning: its metallic images—while driving through my city, or preparing a meal, or walking to class—would suddenly appear gleaming in my head. This for weeks! I carried “3/23/2015 0006 hrs.” around in my body like the thing that was inhaled early in the poem. And yes, I could feel its “pretentious heartbeat / Submerged in fear.” On my lips, in my mouth, and down into my lungs, the sense of “wet copper / Like pennies in children mouths / Like the steel tip of revolvers” I could not exhale. And when I tried, the poem persisted with its “click” and “Shhh.” With so much torque and attention to original internal rhymes that dig and dig, I simply cannot turn from this poem. And listen to these slant rhymes: “pretentious,” “infants;” “romantic,” “indefinite,” “click;” “brass,” “magic;” “Conception,” “death;” “Mystic,” “appendage.” Here is a poet that pays attention to her own music, and what’s more, trusts that personal noise.

3/23/2015 0006 hrs.

The taste of wet copper
Like pennies in children mouths
Like the steel tip of revolvers
Inhale
You could feel your pretentious heartbeat
Submerged in fear, like infants in wombs
There is something romantic about the silence
Before the indefinite click
Shhh...
Ammo to brass like magic
Voilà
Conception
The instant birth of death
Mystic at your weakest appendage

— Sequoia Sinclair

SECOND PLACE POEM

"Naivety Leads to Escapades" beautifully renders the lyric experience in irregular lines wrought with glee. And that is what I probably like most about the poem: the jubilation with which it encounters the ordinary and, in a flash, acknowledges and honors both how tiny and huge we are. This is a serious pursuit, but the playfulness of the high/low earthy language is undeniably clear in lines awash with quirky internal rhyme. This poem seems to spread its arms to the wide, wide world, and with a great big grin, says, "YES!" Here's one of those moments: "Excreted from those mellow-earth toned moments, a creation of the conscious mind begins / upon traveling through the brain's sensory chamber and awakening / Slumberous sweet remembrance."

Naivety Leads to Escapades

Sometimes you must sway and fancifully smile

Slightly, when experiencing the bliss of

arbitrary calmness

For excreted from those mellow-earth toned moments, a creation of the conscious mind begins upon traveling through the brain's sensory chambers and awakening

Slumberous sweet remembrance , that infuses those unique moments that mean most within your cranium for a lifetime

Within this type of moment I became an escapist, going on an unplanned tribal run

Where the sun indirectly beamed down upon my face and nothing existed except me and the illusionary chase

Of the radiant glow of the sun while playing hide-and-seek with me, peeking between the trees leaves with glittering yellow golden encrusted orbs of light always shining bright

My arms and legs moved smoothly as if I were maneuvering through water with a sense of dexterity and peace

Wind swished past my face causing a ripple-effect which erupted a cool breezy force that dispersed past my scalp and through my dreads as I was nearing the end of the chase

My heart beats moved in a wild manner as many African tribes move to the beat of the Congo drum

I finally came to a halt to catch my breath upon the capture of a sparkling orb from the sun that I unwittingly placed upon my skin, therefore storing the universal energy source within

— *Tamara Martin*

THIRD PLACE POEM

*"It would be nearly impossible not to notice the ways in which "Loveth Day" respectfully adheres to form throughout its four stanzas of iambic tetrameter. Or to ignore the attention to image, diction, and metaphor in lovingly crafted lines that conclude with an ABABAB rhyme scheme. In "Loveth Day," everything seems accounted for: form and meaning, meter, sonic achievement, and sensory detail...Here's my favorite moment:
"When lo, in gold was sung the song / That Seraphim's harvest reap."*

Loveth Day

Methoughts by moonlight my star-crossed sealed,
 Yet, alas, it beith not so.
As Morphius' dream hath revealed,
 Twas by sun the seed was sown.
For in the moon are arts concealed,
 But by the sun is beauty known.

By night are promises made with eyes,
 In day with depth and intellect.
What passion doth make in spry,
 Moderation tempers in full effect.
Haste not to crest and therein die,
 But let thy courtship be well spent.

About the stars I raptured long,
 Expecting love in shadow's keep.
Wrought in silver was my throng,
 As to oblivion do cherubs weep.
When lo, in gold was sung the song
 That Seraphim's harvest reap.

Beseech not, dear friends, thy youth's diversions.
 Herein my wisdom doth impart:
Love will come without expectation,
 By moon or sun mattereth naught.
Only let thy mind guide imagination,
 Suffer the right and bridle the heart.

— *James Wright*





Judgement of Paris sketch - Tiffany Kokotis

Another world, Another place

Maybe in another world,
Another place,
Maybe on a mountain,
With it's Queen Anne's Lace,
Maybe at the beach,
Surfing it's waves,
We may have met one another,
Face to face.

I wonder what I would have thought,
When you came into view,
What is her name?
I honestly have no clue.
Nevermind, you.

And yet,
Curious,
My eyes would linger,
And I would say to myself,
What if she's thinking about YOU?

With sudden courage,
And a little stupidity too,
I would walk up,
And say,
"Hello, how do you do?"

Then only pray,
That you might in fact say,
"I'm doing just fine.
How about, you?"

At the sound of your voice,
My heart would go a flutter,
And all I could do,
Is mutter,
"Why would a girl like you,
Ever even talk,
To a guy like me?"

And my only wish,
Is that you would flatter me,
So much as to answer,
That one little inquiry.

— *Jamie Costner*

Sonnet for the Homesick

You were so homesick; no pill could cure it.
Trudged around wondering when you would go.
Stopping sometimes to smile at us and sit.
You laughed and joked, you put on your best show,
But you were not happy without him here.
Homesick, you were, your life left you alone.
But he was homesick and just sick this year.
Then his last days came and he said, "My home
Is up there." "Why'd he go first?" You had said.
You wanted home, too, but old age takes time.
Days, weeks, months, years you were thinking ahead.
Waiting to be called home, toeing flat lines.
Then you heard those trumpet voices singing
Running to answer your joy-call ringing.

— *Emily Weekley*

Lock and Key

She holds
it. The magical
thing that changes
me. When I'm with
her, I'm a
different
person.
She
helps
me
to
be
good
and it
scares the

hell out
of
me.
If
I
lose
her
I will lose
a part
of me. A
part I
can never
get back.
She opens
my in-
most being
and looks
in my
soul. How
can a lock
be useful
if it loses
its key?

— *Rebecca Hance*



J.Cole - Toriana Mack

Ichabod Wyandotte

You've heard of the horseman —
But rarely the rooster,
Yet Mike quite exceptionally hedged
The fate of the axe
As it sliced through its object;
The block's story tells where it was wedged.

No beak and no comb
Yet wings and full-feathered,
Mike's hearing went out on one side;
So he thought he would walk a bit,
Peck in the darkness —
Take his altered existence in stride.

He crowed—that is, gurgled.
He pruned—not so well,
Chased a hen to the cornermost fence;
The hen thought him frightful,
As she normally did,
But the farmer stood dazed in suspense.

"Well, this is uncanny.
It's been quite a while.
He'll fall over dead in a second."
So he waited and watched
While Mike kept right on living.
"Give the Reaper ten minutes," he reckoned.

Ten minutes gone by,
He regarded the wedge
And the axe firmly stuck in its hold.
Nearby in the pail
Mike's belfry had landed,
Chucked with others—indifferent and cold.

*Bring Mike's life's blood;
Use the dropper —
Draw out the sputum;
Drop in each grain.
The farmer knows the actions proper —
When to nourish
When to drain.*

What would you do
If the farmer were you?
Would you unwedge that axe for a fryer?
Or would the Fates make their mark?
Would the miracle impart
That plans beyond man's extend higher?

Wouldn't you want
Others to know?
Perhaps to confirm you're still sane?
Mike in his crate
Took a jaunt to the pub —
Winning bets past each hour he was "slain."

A friend of the farmer
Saw future potential —
Sideshowes and people in droves.
New life loudly beckoned —
Fresh places to venture —
Leave the coops and the furrows and groves.

First, though, deft scientists
Must meet up with Mike,
Must use university skill —
Must mimic the act
On other young fryers —
Must polish their scalpels to kill.

And when they can't duplicate —
When they can't make
Another Mike out of the flock,
Then all will know truly —
Then all will perceive —
Mike's no boilerplate chicken from stock.

*Bring Mike's life's blood
Use the dropper —
Draw out the sputum;
Drop in each grain.
The farmer knows the actions proper —
When to nourish
When to drain.*

Mike took time and life to task;
Time and *Life* stopped to prick their ears.
They heard of the sideshows
And visited —
Thinking all might be smoke
And mirrors.

But no smoke
Filled the curtained chicken stall.
No mirrors
Could the viewers perceive.
One quarter promised, beyond a hooked wall,
No tricks up the farmer's sleeve.

Sure, no tricks,
But a sleepy Wyandotte —
With its "head" tucked under a wing.
Seeing nighttime e'er upon him —
To the morning,
Mike ne'er would sing.

So they'd nudge,
And Mike would take his cue —
Strut around the sideshow stall —
Give gawkers good gains
For twenty-five cents;
They'd learn it was worth it all.

Time and *Life* made brave Mike famous.
But, of course, it could not last.
Now Mike's amazing eighteen months —
Have drifted off —
Into the —
Past.

*We've lost Mike's life's blood
We've lost the dropper —
Spry banties
Have swallowed the grain.
No need to follow the actions proper —
We'll ne'er see Mike's like
Again.*

In Fruita, there's a festival:
Hunt the "treasure" of Mike's crown —
Join the 5K Headless Chicken Race —
Toss raw eggs —
Almond-hued,
Or brown.

If you go there,
You can celebrate
Not the ending of Mike's life —
But his dogged,
Fowl tenacity —
His outwitting of the knife.

Even though he lost some listening skills —
And although he lost
His cackle,
To conquer a future on a plate —
Was a cinch for Mike to
Tackle.

Not a cinch for you or me,
Of course —
Rarely a cinch in our lives ever —
We haven't the will to make it so —
We're generally not so —
Clever.

Eighteen months in nineteen-forty-five
We've not given much attention.
But perhaps we should give —
Mike's life a thought —
And sometimes,
Give it a mention.

*We've lost Mike's life's blood
We've lost the dropper —
Spry banties
Have swallowed the grain.
No need to follow the actions proper —
We'll ne'er see Mike's like
Again.*

— Val Czerny



Aspiring to Get Ahead - Val Czerny

Marissa Marjorie Sue Vazquez Carmona

Your mom, you see,
Remembers you so clearly.
You were her first daughter, Marissa.
The one she always wanted.
She loved you so much even though
She had to let you go.
That was the hardest decision
She ever had to make, still is.



Baby that song that reminds her of you:

“Need you now” by Lady A.

Your mom renamed it

“Marissa’s Song.”

Every time she hears it she cries.

Your brother, Calyb, knows it too.

So you see Marissa, You are loved.

You have two families that love you,

Would do anything for you.

Remember that.

As I sit here and write this, it still brings tears to my eyes.

For your mother is the strongest person I know.

Your brother still talks about you.
He told me the other day how much
He misses you.
Your mom had no money, and no place to go.
It doesn’t make sense to you now, but
One day it will.
She tried and tried to make it work, but
Honey it wasn’t getting any better.
She gave you up on February 2010.
She cried and watched as you were driven away,
with tears in her eyes, questioning her decision.
“I want her back,” she’d say.
But she knew you wouldn’t have to worry about
Nothing with her new mom.
I asked her mom if she regretted
Letting you go.
She replied, “No,
I know she’ll be okay.”

— Ashley Francis



Water Meets Wiregrass - Jason Lee

A Prayer for My Son

While it was day
You did the works
of One Who sent You—
But now
when that day
is past?
Look down upon my son
(facie ad faciem)
with the same eyes
that looked upon a man born blind
and glorify Your name
in him.

— *Armond Boudreaux*

I Found

Darkness filled the skies, gloomy, weak, yet wise, and how surprised I was to find another this year, that's twice. The wind grew silent and still, but not before it kindly revealed a precious treasure underneath a mound of dirt and damp moss just beyond the hills. I visit the country once a month, just to get away from the city life, the noise, the constant movement of people and traffic. Oh how tragic. I can't seem to find peace-- like a piece is missing from my soul, but woe unto me I see what I know to be what I have been longing for. I then tightly closed my eyes; praying the sun would rise, but of course it was still night. But then again, on the bright side, I realized I breathed among the simplicity of the night sky, the calm of the river side, the slight breeze making its way through the trees, rustling on the cold hard ground through the dead leaves, skidding across the waters alongside the ghostly fog. Everything was perfect.

Hidden just behind a log was the rest of my treasure, but I must cross the river to claim my prize. I heaved my boat into the river waters. Chills ran down my spine like the "Itsy Bitsy Spider" ran down the water spout. The hairs on the back of my neck stood up simultaneously like a crowd cheering for an encore. With all the excitement, I left behind my oar, leaning against an oak tree. Disappointed but desperate, I dipped my hands into the cool river water because I knew, waiting for me on the other side, was a precious gift from another. It is said, "One man's trash is another man's treasure," and so I will treasure this in which he considered trash with pleasure. It could not have been a better night to stumble upon a pearl so precious. The breeze has seized once more, leaving the trees and the dead leaves in a stand-still and the fog that once gracefully lifted into mid-air. Unfortunately it became a little more difficult to see ahead, but the moon hovered as if to say, "I am all the light you need," and I couldn't agree more. Everything was still perfect.

My fingers were numb and pruned. I breathed steadily to keep my pace. I paused for a moment, but only for a moment. In that moment I leaned over the side of my boat and glanced at my reflection. I thought myself handsome. I thought myself beautiful. I thought myself sick, but got rid the idea quick. I am who I am, which is me, and that is all I can be. My reflection quickly distorted and the moment faded in glory. Oh what a story this will be when I am able to share it with thee. I looked over the river and through the fog, knowing there would be no reply at all; however, I continued to call. I knew when I had you, my life would forever change.

The boat came to a halt and rested on the bank. My heart pounded out of my chest, trying to capture the love of the atmosphere. My pulse iraced rapidly like a junky who has overdosed. My brow sweated profusely, trying to fill the remaining space in the river. My legs trembled like a baby taking its first step. And I took my first step out of my boat onto the ground of the other side and I could not deny my enthusiasm, for I am was one step closer to collecting my find. I raced to my treasure and knelt down. I went to rush in, but quickly changed my mind and slowly drew back. Once I had you back home where you belonged, you would no longer be lost, no longer be bound to that false grave.

Though ecstatic, I was able to keep my composure. I moved the leaves from my treasure's weary cheeks, a beautiful, gallant, and majestic masterpiece. Once again the moon did not let me down. It lit her eyes just so, as I prayed her soul to go. She couldn't have been lifeless for more than a week, and now she is all mine to keep. She is perfect.

— *Jasmine Brewton*



Wythe to Bruton, Watercolor - Mike Luzzi



All Eyes on You - Toriana Mack

Let Me Show You (Part 2)

Jesus said, *"I just relayed the blessings
From only up above,
But since you want to complain that you're sick and tired...
Now let me tell you what I'm sick and tired of."*

*"I'm sick and tired of my people going
All out of their way for work.
You can go all out for your boss and co-workers,
Yet you can't go all out for church."*

*"I'm sick and tired of my people playing
Like church is just a game.
Don't you realize every time you play,
All you're doing is slandering my name?"*

*"You have gone blind to the price I paid.
I laid my life for you.
You don't understand how I was crucified
And you're tired of going through?"*

*"You don't understand how blessed you are.
Child you are highly favored.
You just went through several little trials.
You ain't even begun to labor."*

*"I know the trials were a little hard on you
I know it's too much for the brain.
I felt like that when they crucified me,
But not once did I ever complain."*

Y'all, the Lord had to break me down
He crushed my pity party.
He crushed my party ever so low.
I had no choice, but to say I'm sorry

“Lord what exactly can I do for you
Because I don’t know where to start?”
All He said was, *“Don’t take me for granted.
And all I want is your heart.”*

*“The way you were before you met me,
My child you were a mess.
After you accepted me into your life,
My child since then, you’ve been blessed.”*

I asked the Lord to forgive my foolishness
And I hoped he could find a way.
And the one thing I love about the Lord Jesus Christ,
He hugged me and said, *“That’s okay.”*

The next time you think you haven’t been blessed
And the Lord hasn’t been your friend,
The next time you feel he owes you something,
You’d better think it over again.

Think of everything He’s blessed you with,
And the people He’s placed in your life
He’s brought you a mentor, pastor, friend,
Husband, kids, and wife

Understand that Jesus laid down His life
To bring you up out of your mess,
So tonight as you fall on your hands and knees,
Thank God...For surely you are blessed

— *Wrashea D. Hubbard*



Christ of the Abyss - Desmal Purcell

Woody McGillicutty

When the family returned from vacation they discovered their house had been broken into. Girlie magazines were strewn about the living room, and though Father yelled at Mother, Son, and Daughter to stay outside while he scrambled to collect them, Mother had already seen them and didn't subscribe to his theory that the burglar or burglars must have left them.

"I guess it could have been worse," said Father, "I've heard they sometimes defecate on people's dining room tables."

Mother ran around crying "Oh No!" as she checked all the rooms.

"Don't touch anything," Father told her. "I'll call the police."

After Father had returned the magazines to what he thought had been his secret hiding place, he came to Mother's side and put his hands on her shoulders to comfort her, but she pulled away and ran out to her children.

A quick inventory revealed that only one item had been stolen: Woody McGillicutty, Son's ventriloquist dummy. The Detective thought this strange and aimed his pen at the brand-new forty-two-inch HDTV set. He wanted to know if Father had any weapons. Father said no, and from the disappointed look on The Detective's face, got the impression that nothing much could be done.

While eating dinner at KFC, the family tried to imagine what the burglar or burglars looked like. Father envisioned two black males in their late twenties-- bearded, tattooed, mean-eyed, and mocking. Because she had found a single glass in the sink, Mother reasoned that there had been only one intruder, and the fact that he chose a jelly jar to drink from out all the other glasses showed that he loved his mother. She saw a young Harrison Ford. Daughter pictured a boy and a girl, lovers on the run, forced to travel at night, the boy possibly a vampire. She wondered if they had pulled the shoebox out from under her bed and found her diary. Son only hoped that whoever had stolen Woody McGillicutty was not abusing him.

That night, as Father and Mother prepared for bed, Mother asked, "Why do you look at those lewd pictures? Don't you find me attractive any more?"

"Of course I do."

"Then why?"

"All men do it."

"My daddy didn't."

"How do you know?"

"Because we lived in a very small house. There's nowhere he could have hidden them."

"You'd be surprised."

"I want them out of here, and never again bring that filth into my house."

"All right."

"I mean it."

"I said all right."

"And I think you need to see someone."

"See someone?"

"Yes. You have a problem."

"I don't have a problem."

"Ha! I'll make an appointment for you."

"No."

"If you don't see someone, I'm going to have Daddy talk to you."

Father cringed. "All right. Make the damned appointment. But I'm not taking any time off work for it." He was a claims adjuster at McNamarra Risk Management.

Mother went into the bathroom, slamming the door. Father punched his pillow into submission and lay down and listened to his wife brushing her teeth. Yes, he thought, she is a human being just like me. After a while, he heard a yelp, and Mother rushed in, foaming at the mouth. "I think I know who did it!"

"Who?"

"That strange looking man who mows lawns around here. He drives a green truck with one of those trailers. You've seen him. He's tall and skinny with long hair and no front teeth."

"Why do you think it was him?"

"Because he came to the door and asked if we wanted our bushes trimmed. I said no. I told him *you* were going to do it yourself as soon as we got back from vacation." She seemed pleased with herself for remembering the incident.

"Why in the Holy Hell did you tell him that?"

"Because I wanted to get rid of him; he was giving me the creeps."

"Unbelievable!" said Father. "On second thought, I'm not seeing a shrink. *I'm* not the one who needs help. And I'm not talking to your *Daddy* either."

"These are two separate issues."

“No. Both have to do with choices. I chose to buy those magazines, which in retrospect, appears to have been a mistake, and you chose to divulge highly personal information to a total stranger who then used that information to rob us.”

Having no good reply, Mother went back into the bathroom.

Later that night, feeling both defiled and guilty, Father rolled over in the dark and attempted foreplay, but Mother protested and pushed him away. He lay there like a corpse, fearing he would never be able to make love in that house again.

“You’re lucky,” a co-worker told Father. “What if you would have walked in on the burglar and he had a gun?” Father imagined himself attempting to close the distance between himself and the intruder, but not making it, a shot ringing out, a family member falling.

In her diary, Daughter wrote to the burglars: *I hope you had fun reading this. You probably thought I was just saying stuff a million other girls say. You must have laughed your asses off. I hate both of you.*

Son studied his ventriloquist’s dummy catalog, but the new Woody McGillicutties looked different. There was a sadness about the eyes. Besides, after all the pillow talk he and Woody had shared, no other dummy would do. Son threw the catalog in the trash and vowed that the next time the two blonde young men from the Mormon Church came to the door, he would invite them in for cookies and milk.

On his way home from work, Father spotted the green truck with the landscaping trailer his wife had mentioned parked in front of a house. He pulled to the curb, got out, and hearing the drone of a lawnmower coming from the backyard, crept over to the truck and looked in the driver’s side window. There was a big plastic soda bottle half full of yellowish liquid, a grease-stained brown paper sack, a crumpled pack of cigarettes, and--A DOG-EARED COPY OF A PAMPHLET ENTITLED *MASTERING THE ART OF VENTRILQUISM*. He scurried back to his car and called Mother on his cell phone. She was basting a chicken.

“You were right,” said Father. “He’s the one.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to have a little talk with him.”

“Oh, Father. Be careful. You don’t know what he’s capable of.”

“Don’t worry. I know what I’m doing. If I’m not home in ten minutes, call the police.”

After he hung up, he saw The Hillbilly coming across the lawn on a John Deere X300. Father approached with as much nonchalance as he could muster. The man glanced over, but showed no interest. He shut down the mower, eased off it, and stood tall.

“Hi there,” said Father, forcing a grin. “I live down the street there, and somebody

broke into our house while we were on vacation." He watched for a response from The Hillbilly, but the man's eyes were half hidden by long, sweat-soaked hair, and the mouth was a mere crease on a face nearly erased by the sun. "So, you know, I'm asking everybody if they noticed anything suspicious-- you know, any strangers hanging around, or anything."

The Hillbilly shrugged and said, "I ain't seen nothing." Father noted the missing front teeth, the thick tongue slipping through the gap, the hint of a leer. He remembered the magazines the burglar had put on display, and he fought to hide his shame. He looked towards the cab of the truck, wanting to ask about the ventriloquist book, but The Hillbilly had already grabbed a weed whacker from the trailer and started yanking on the cord until it sputtered and whined.

"You did it," Father said under his breath as he headed back to his car.

At the police station, after Father had told him his story, The Detective rocked back and forth on his heels and stared out his office window at the barely visible outline of the mountains. "Yes," he sighed, "I know him. We've had a few run-ins with him, DUI's mostly. He's had a hard life. You know, his forefathers-- mine too, for that matter-- got off the boat from Scotland and headed west, but when they saw this here land of ours, it reminded them so much of home, they decided to settle here."

"That's very interesting," said Father, "but couldn't you—"

"They were a proud and fierce people. They fought Indians and wild animals. They raised their families and made this country what it is today."

"Look. Couldn't you at least question him? I mean, don't you think it's a little too much of a coincidence that he's driving around with a book about ventriloquism in the very neighborhood where a boy had his dummy stolen?"

The Detective nodded. "In real life-- maybe."

"Well then?"

"I'll look into it."

Father didn't believe him.

At dinner, Father, his knife and fork raised for emphasis, announced to his family, "There are going to be some major changes in this house. No secrets. From now on everybody is going to know what everyone else is doing." Later, he went to his daughter's bedroom door and tried to knock in an authoritative yet loving manner.

"Yes?" his daughter snarked from the other side.

"What are you doing?"

"Nothing."

"It is impossible to do nothing. Once again, what are you doing?"

"Writing."

"Writing what?"

"Dad!"

"I'm serious. What are you writing? You say you write, but none of us have ever seen your writing. When are you going to share it with the rest of the family?"

"Never."

"I see."

The door opened slowly and her moon face appeared in the crack. "I am writing in my diary, and the whole point of writing in a diary is so I can say whatever I want without fear of reprisals."

"There is nothing you can say or do that would make me love you any less."

He could see that she didn't believe him.

Father followed The Hillbilly from a distance for a good half hour, up through the hills and into the mountains, through the downtown section of a little town with an old-time general store, past the courthouse, until eventually the truck turned down a narrow dirt driveway at the end of which a grimy little shack hid behind overgrown bushes. Now Father knew where the man lived, but he didn't know what to do about it.

When he told Mother, she said, "I don't want you risking your life. It's not worth it. *Things* can be replaced. *You* can't.

Father bought two joints from the kid in the mailroom. He planned to plant them in The Hillbilly's truck and then phone the police with an anonymous tip, but as the day wore on he began to see the futility of it all, so he drove to the state park and smoked both joints himself. When night fell he looked through his windshield at the stars twinkling in a universe he had always believed conspired against him. His phone buzzed, and he saw it was his wife calling. Somehow he knew she had been crying. He drove home, and as he got out of the car, she rushed up and hugged him.

"I was just about to call the police," she said. "I thought you were—."

He clasped his hand gently over her mouth and whispered, "It's over." That night they were happy at the same time for the first time in their marriage.

Years later, when the kids were away at college and Mother was at her ceramics class, Father fixed a microwave dinner and sat in front of the seventy-two-inch screen and watched a comedy special. The host announced the next act, and suddenly, filling the screen were two heads, one small and one large. Father leaned forward and squinted. There was something familiar about those heads. Yes! The smaller one was Woody McGillicutty, only modified to resemble The Hillbilly who had stolen him! The long hair, the toothless mouth. Father moved closer, and what he saw amazed him. The larger head belonged to the hillbilly himself, but now he had bright new teeth and close-cropped, graying hair. Yes! It was definitely him! Father laughed. Their act was funny! The dummy cracked wise, the way they always do, and the former hillbilly was extremely skilled; he didn't move his lips at all and even did the glass of water bit!

A tear rolled down Father's cheek, and to this day he can't tell you why, but it was the second happiest moment of his life.

--S.D. Lavender



Tina the Llama - Celeste Rodriguez-Teran

Henry's Secret

Characters:

CLAIRE MATTHEWS: *Wife of Henry*

SHANE ANDERSON: *Claire's brother*

SUSAN STEVENS: *Friend of Claire*

DOCTOR ROBERT: *Doctor at Saint Moral Hospital*

SCENE ONE: THE MATTHEW'S MANSION

(SEVERAL PEOPLE are drinking and chatting. CLAIRE and SUSAN are downstage)

CLAIRE: I'm going to kill him!

SUSAN: Claire calm down. I'm sure he'll be here soon.

(CLAIRE pulls her hand away from SUSAN and walks over to the refrigerator and pulls out a wine bottle. CLAIRE pours herself another glass of wine)

CLAIRE: Who is late for their own birthday party?

(SUSAN sits at the table twiddling her thumbs nervously)

SUSAN: I'm sure he has a good excuse for being late.

CLAIRE: And I won't hear it! I told that fool to be here at 7:00 o'clock and it is now 8:30.

(SHANE stumbles into the kitchen, slightly drunk)

SHANE: Beautiful sister! I have been looking for you and that bastard of a husband of yours.

(SHANE goes to give CLAIRE a hug, but she backs away)

CLAIRE: Shane! You're drunk already?

SUSAN: I'm not surprised.

SHANE: I heard that!

CLAIRE: This is why Henry kicked you out of the house. You were always drinking.

SHANE: How can you let that jerk kick me out of the house? Your own brother?!

CLAIRE: Shane, I don't have time for your bickering. I need to find out where Henry is.

SHANE: I don't see why you married that jerk. All he does is manipulate and use people.

SUSAN: He is a Lawyer.

(The wall phone rings, CLAIRE answers it)

CLAIRE: Hello? Yes, this is she. What? Oh, my God! Yes...Yes...I'll be there as fast as I can.

(CLAIRE hangs up and starts to rush out, but SUSAN grabs her)

SUSAN: What on earth is going on?

CLAIRE: Henry's been in an accident. He's at the hospital. I--I have to go.

SUSAN: We'll all go.

SHANE: I'll drive.

CLAIRE: You're not driving anywhere. I'll drive.

(Exit CLAIRE, SUSAN, and SHANE)

SCENE TWO: THE HOSPITAL

(Doctors and nurses are running around. The FRONT DESK NURSE is typing on her computer.

OTHER PEOPLE are waiting. CLAIRE sits in a chair. SUSAN sits beside her. SHANE paces nervously. A few beats, and then DOCTOR ROBERT enters holding a bouquet of roses)

DOCTOR ROBERT: Claire Matthews?

CLAIRE: I am Claire Matthews. How is my husband?

DOCTOR ROBERT: We operated on his brain to relieve the pressure. We won't know if there has been any permanent damage until he regains consciousness. Once he is settled in his room you can go and see him. Oh, and he was clutching these flowers. *(DOCTOR ROBERT hands the bouquet to CLAIRE and exits)*

CLAIRE: Oh, God. I was such a witch about his being late. I feel so awful now. *(She notices a card inside the flowers, extracts it, and begins to read)* I know you hate being my secret. I will tell my wife about us in time. I hope these roses will allow you to forgive me. I am still trying to understand these new feelings. I will see you soon. I love you, Shane....SHANE?. *(CLAIRE drops the note as if it's on fire. She sits back down and puts her head in her hands)*

SHANE: I can explain!

SUSAN: You bastard!

CLAIRE: My own brother betrayed me in the worst possible way! How could you do this to me! And Henry! How could I have not noticed the sexual tension between you two? I thought you hated each other! (*CLAIRE slaps SHANE*) How long have you been sleeping with my husband?!

SUSAN: Answer her question, Shane.

SHANE: Look, Sis it doesn't mean ...

CLAIRE: I asked you how long!

SHANE: Six months.

(CLAIRE, taken aback, sits down and starts to cry. SUSAN sits by CLAIRE and hugs her)

SHANE: Claire, I wanted to tell you for so long, but he convinced me to wait. I never wanted to hurt you.

CLAIRE: But you *did* hurt me.

SHANE: I told him that if he wouldn't tell you, I would. That's why he kicked me out of the house.

(CLAIRE gets up from her seat and pushes the roses and note into SHANE'S chest.)

CLAIRE: Here. These are for you. You want Henry? Well, you can have him.

(CLAIRE exits. SUSAN slaps SHANE and goes after CLAIRE. SHANE slumps into a chair)

SHANE: *(to himself)* Was Henry worth it? I hurt my only sister and destroyed her marriage. She'll never forgive me. I guess it's true what they say; buried secrets always rise to the light. *(SHANE sniffs the roses, enjoying the smell at first, but then he groans, clutches his stomach, and exits furiously. We hear him vomit)*

— Khiara Lanier



Biting Orchids - Jessica McVay



Doctor Who - Celeste Rodriguez-Teran



Table - Tiffany Kokotis

Burn Away

Burn away, burn away,
I guess that it's my turn today;
To become the man you wanted me to be,
I'll just have to learn the ways;
How to treat you, never beat you,
By your side, because I couldn't leave you;
Drive a thousand miles, just to see you,
All the girls just want to be you.

Since you've been gone,
I've been going insane,
Now my love's burned out,
But my heart remains aflame;
I can't see how you ever loved me,
Seemed to never put anything above me;
I was hooked, like you drugged me,
And I felt your cold heart every time you hugged me;
We can pretend it was never lasting.
I'll stay here in my pile of ashes;
Forget tomorrow as we waste today,
As my flame for love, slowly, burns away.

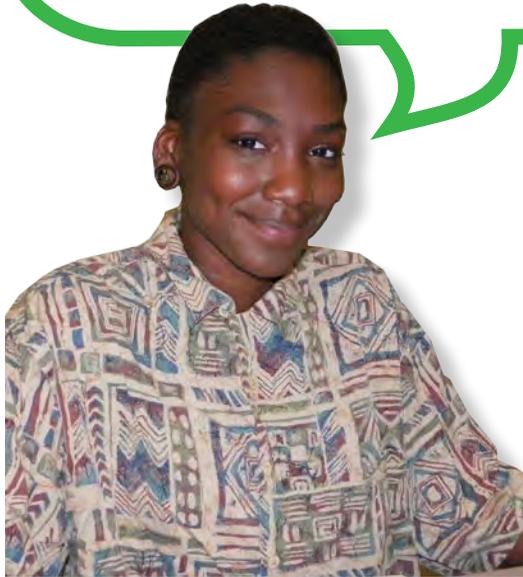
— *Jeremy Riggs*

Gabby Moore says:

YES!

Your work could appear
in the 2017 issue of Wiregrass.

Please submit your poems,
short stories, plays and artwork
as word docs or jpegs to:
slavende@ega.edu





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