



Windhover

A Journal of Christian Literature

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Contents

Foreword

Douglas G. Campbell

Aftereffect1

Michael H. Lythgoe

Liturgy of the Hours, Southwest2

Maryanne Hannan

Concert4

Chet Corey

Angels in Death Spirals5

Micah Bloom

Artwork6

Michael H. Lythgoe

Interventions: The Art of Micah Bloom.....10

Robert B. Moreland

No Plan B.....12

Maryanne Hannan

Wings.....13

Chet Corey

Cain's Wife.....14

Joe R. Christopher

The Decision.....16

Jennifer Clark

Grieving The God of My Youth17

Max Harris

First Blood18

Michael D. Riley

Pilate's Clothes22

Chritopher Fahy	
Iscariot (from Matthew)	23
Aaron Brown	
Taking Communion with Goldfish.....	24
Nathaniel A. Schmidt	
The Converts.....	25
Jennifer Clark	
I Want a Church	26
Brian Rutenberg	
Artwork	27
Michael H. Lythgoe	
Ecstasy in The Lowcountry: On Brian Rutenberg's Paintings.....	31
Aaron Brown	
Evacuation Ebenezer.....	36
Sally Clark	
Shooting Craps	38
Michael D. Riley	
A Prayer to Pray Again	39
Sally Clark	
The Widow's Mite	40
Kelley White	
(the stones I chose, the stones I lost).....	41
Michael H. Lythgoe	
Ranchos de Taos	42
Michael D. Riley	
In Memoriam	43
Greg Spencer	
The Summer of My Gathering Mortality	44

Douglas G. Campbell	
Muscle-Bound	45
Sally Clark	
Prayer in Public Schools	46
Maryanne Hannan	
Pact.....	47
Kelley White	
Report (CY47)	48
Jennifer Clark	
When God Chuckles in Your Bones.....	49
Paul Michael Garrison	
The Pet	50
Sister Kate Martin	
Vanishing.....	56
Michael H. Lythgoe	
Santo Bulto	57
Greg Spencer	
On the news of Connie's near-passing.....	58
Michael D. Riley	
A Prayer for First Light	59
Michael H. Lythgoe	
review of <i>Every Riven Thing</i> by Christian Wiman	60
review of <i>A God in the House: Poets Talk about Faith</i> by Ilya Kaminsky and Katherine Towler, eds	63
Contributors	66
Submission and Subscription Information	70
Invitation to Writers' Festival	72

*Douglas G. Campbell***Aftereffect**

Early this morning
when the moon looked
like a cotton ball in the
dark sky and trees were
merely thick or thin
lines scrawled upon
dark blue paper, the robins,
towhees and other birds
were crazy with song.

The recent sunny interlude
amidst a string of gray
rain-filled days has jolted
and jostled almost every
living thing into some kind
of near ecstasy. Perhaps
that's the way it should be
on the Monday after Easter.

The universe is not quite
ready to revert back to the
normal routine, the crushing
lethargy or the everyday
sequence of events.
Energy or electricity still
pulses through all who would
open themselves to a
transcendent promise.

Chet Corey

Angels in Death Spirals

Angels in death spirals
who in their diving know they cannot die
pull up at Mach 2,
corkscrew off into shrouded cloud,
sunlight shawling through like holy linen of Turin.
They who have studied the dalliance
of eagles and swept-wing fighters that flame out
somersault like the clash of cymbals at a Sommerfest,
enraptured at their free-fall
into our fallen, earthborn bodies.

Max Harris

First Blood

After eight days had passed, it was time to circumcise the child.

Luke 2:21

When I awake, I am still with you.

I was crying when I fell asleep, riddled with hiccups, the aftershocks of howling. Now my eyes are swollen, sore, but I can smell your scent of passion and sour milk. I can feel your arms around me, my slight weight filling them, perhaps, with pins and needles.

The darkness cannot hide me. Your lips can find my soft skin anywhere. They rest against my forehead, walk the rounded distance downward to my ear. They nibble on my skin. You're tired from all the pain already, but you tell me in a whisper you delight in me. You are young. Your breath is like apples.

You taste my eyelids with your tongue. At first, they feel like fresh grapes, but the corners sting, sour, with salt. It breaks your heart when I cry. You feel as though you've let me down. You wish you could devour my pain.

We're not alone.

Your husband sleeps. His calloused hands are stained with resin. His knives rest, sheathed, beside his bed. His mallet dangles from a slanted peg. He thought he might find makeshift work.

A drunkard slurs his winter song outside. He starts again. Again, but farther off. You must be cold.

Your husband wasn't there the night I slipped inside you like a shaft of sunlight, warming your bed. You were frightened at first, protesting your innocence ("How can this be?"), but you yielded quickly, celebrating flesh and things turned upside down. An end to disembodied words, you thought.

Before the dawn, you fled your husband's anger, scudding, like a fishing boat before the wind. The stars dimmed. Storm clouds, you were certain, gathered at your back. Ahead of you, your long dress billowed like a nine-month belly. Already you loved me.

You climbed the rising waves of vineyards and stone walls. You hid from shepherds, slipped on sheep shit. Inching sunrise gave back color to the earth's cheeks. Pools turned rippled

pink, their surface closing over small frogs. Tufts of wild flowers peeked from crevices. A flock of long-haired goats rang bells like priests. You slowed. The steady pattern of your steps had calmed you. In an elbow of the path, you stopped to see you weren't pursued.

A lark soared, sprinkling you with song. You stood, your head back, bathing in the liquid air. Perhaps the lowly rise like larks, you thought.

You clambered zigzag up the path, your young legs strong again. You helped yourself to ears of barley, rubbing chaff from kernel in your hand.

You told your cousin, in the hills, "He fills the hungry with good things."

"Doesn't he!" she said. She was in her sixth month then, the baby kicking like a hare.

She wrapped her arms around you, comforting. She'd long ago turned gray. Her husband smiled, but didn't say a word. He heated bowls of lentil stew and cracked a loaf of bread.

You stayed three months. Her belly grew. You helped to cook the meals. You milked the gravy-colored cow. You cooled your cousin's brow with soft, moist cloths. She asked you, please, to cut back on the spices. Garlic made her belch, she said, like an old drunk crone. She talked of love, the miracles of pleasure and the splinting of the heart. She giggled like the girl you are. You laughed with her.

Your husband tracked you down. Where else could you have gone? He looked at you, bereaved. He murmured of divorce. "A quiet one," he said. "No fuss."

You let him stay. He built a cradle for your cousin's child. The boy had lungs like bellows, heating coals to flame by howling, keeping villages awake. You trembled at his circumcision. In the moonlight, shawms and tabors beckoned guests to dance. The baby's father launched into a song, his old voice echoing around the hills. You leaned across the table to your husband and you said you'd go with him. He nodded.

You left in early morning light and silence. Terraced fields beside the path were summer dry. A fox ran lightfoot through the grape vines, sweeping dust. You felt like you were climbing down inside a failed well.

Your neighbors looked at you askance. Your husband ate his meals in sullen shame. He wouldn't touch you, even in the dark. You huddled in your bed, alone. You thought of me. I scared you sometimes.

Then, one otherwise dull afternoon, you dared to paint

yourself with henna and a splash of spikenard.

“Who’s it for?” he said.

“For you,” you said.

He wasn’t sure. He laid his head against your belly and he wept. You touched the surface of his hair. He pulled away.

But, later, he forgave you. Holding you, he said of me, “I dreamed of him. I know his name.” You picked the splinters from his beard. You licked your finger and you laid it gently on his parched lips.

And, now, he’s brought us where his people once had roots. We came two weeks ago. The town’s so crowded. Even poverty costs more here. Tired from looking after us, he snores.

The three of us slipped out today. I saw the foreign soldiers, standing in pairs at street corners, cradling their weapons. They’re farther from home than we are. They think they rule the world: their name is legion. But, they didn’t hurt me. Bundled underneath a blanket, nose to the wind, I smelled charcoal, grease, and roasting birds.

A beggar rubbed his eyes with cracked, unbending knuckles, but it didn’t help. He couldn’t see. Your husband bent to give the man some bread. He stayed a while to keep the dogs from stealing it.

The foreign soldiers are afraid of terrorists. Religion makes men mad.

We stepped inside a courtyard, stooping through a crumbling archway. Crows picked flecks of skin from cracks between the cobblestones. I smelled the cry of blood. A circle of men stood, parsing laws, around a brazier. They groomed their beards with crusted fingers. You were the only woman. You unwrapped me. I saw the knife.

In the thin darkness, I search for your breasts, my fists flailing until I feel the cotton that covers your flesh. I turn my head, sucking on air. You loosen your dress, parting its tucks like petals. I root like a piglet. Amused, exhausted, you find and feed me your nipple.

I grunt, but you’re kind. “Poor little calf,” you say.

There are few comforts. My lips against your breast (like leavened bread), my moist tongue against your nipple (like a sun-dried cherry), and the quenching of my infant thirst are three. The cow’s warm breath is another. But, the straw scratches and the shit chafes. In the corners of the shed, I hear rats scamper, their ears like shoe leather and their tails like laces.

My limbs are knit together like a scarf.

Today, I screamed. I feared my flesh would unravel at a

slice. The man with the knife made me bleed, but only a little. Millions have suffered the same indignity. I must learn to be quiet.

A stone knife is like a hand-held altar. I have only lost a tiny flap of flesh. I was given a name. Your husband caught his breath.

My glans looks like the uncooked kidney of a pigeon and my piss stings.

I open my eyes. The stars outside are scattered like frost on black earth. The angels have fled, sucked back into the sky like dust.

Michael D. Riley

Pilate's Clothes

How modern he seems. "What is truth?"
His wife and her dreams, his evasions
and sarcasm, his sad celebrity.
"Don't you know who I am?"

The water like liquid silver in the silver bowl,
his empty hands above it, their own reflection
dancing in the silver waves.

Divided by the dice, the soldiers resurrect
his clothes onto their own backs,
hang them from wooden hooks on the barrack's doors,
the seamless tunic and royal purple cloak
special prizes with higher stakes.
Did they feel the man slip through
the arm holes with them, listening to
the crude jokes, rinsing the blood out.
Who knows what cloth contains.
Or withholds. The old rumors
must have tingled their skin some mornings,
themselves dead men rising,
barely alive to the same old duties,
the fibers scraping their arms
like the first warm sunshine.

While Pilate late at night beside a tripod
throwing shadows on the wall
feels amid the same rumors an old dampness
between his fingers, and walks out—
not for the first time—onto the portico,
wearing the dead air around him, praying
for one more anesthetic wind
from the west to put on
through another endless morning.

Sally Clark

Prayer in Public Schools

The holiest place to be in gym class
is here at the end of the line
where prayers are fervent
for the bell to ring early,
allowing an escape,
or for a fire to break out in
the locker room, or perhaps
for the chin-up bar
to unfasten from the wall and fall
with a thunderous bolt,
breaking into two pieces like
the parting of scarlet waters,
a sign from above that the weak
and the overweight
might still someday
inherit the earth.

Sister Kate Martin

Vanishing

She is fragile, vulnerable as glass,
age has lightened her very bones.

Her mind, too, is lighter:
the weight of years drifts away
before she realizes what is lost.
She mourns absences she cannot name.

Where have her memories gone,
the child-rearing, householding, church-going?
She wove a dense dream of family
only to see time
whip it from her hand.

Our hands are what she must hold now,
lightly, before she, too, slips away,
vanishing.

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