
April 2015

From the River Jordan

Tyler van Hoorn
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate>



Part of the Fiction Commons

Recommended Citation

Hoorn, Tyler van (2015) "From the River Jordan," *The Laureate*: Vol. 14 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/laureate/vol14/iss1/6>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Laureate by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.

FROM THE RIVER JORDAN

Tyler van Hoorn

I didn't know who to tell.

I only watched those long days stretch on as my father would leave to come see you, to take you from place to place, whisking you away from treatment to treatment. I would watch as my mother retreated further and further into herself as you followed suit. I did, too. When I came back to school they all wondered where I had been, and all I said was that I was okay, that it would all be okay, that we could be okay, that, please, I was really going to be fine. I smiled as they all talked in hushed tones.

"He hasn't been himself," one would say.

"I'm not sure what he's waiting for," said another.

"How long do you think he'll last?" a third would ask.

But please, don't blame yourself. I couldn't hear them, that litany of voices thrumming in the background, like the rhythm your body refused to circulate, the pace your life now refused to take. The silence played itself into the hymnal of you that was taking shape right before me, taking in shapes I didn't recognize and couldn't name, a book of prayers that wouldn't be heard.

I didn't know what would happen.

We were led into that room together. Children that we were. One by one, one following another. We children of childhood begotten from our parents' parenthood. Generations in sync, together. The divide defined. That lifeless room. Sterilized with tears and hope. I remember that room. It housed all of us. Together in that room, a family of faults, held together by failures forgotten. We just held each other all. We cried communal tears. No one said how scared they were. More than scared, we were altogether loved.

"I'm going to be here," my father, your brother, said to you.

"You'll be okay," your son said.

"What's going to happen?" my sister asked.

And then we all watched as the synod of professionals gathered. They pulled you in every direction but towards us. They anointed you in purple. They dressed you in that gown alien to me. A beautiful mix of red and blue. The color of queens, bestowed upon you.

I didn't know what to say to them.

You. You who could never die, who had too much to live for, who would see us kids grow and graduate, who had to be the exceptional case, because how could you not be? We watched as you showed yourself, again and again, for everyone to see.

We watched you paraded through the streets, as a beacon of strength to all others. I asked my father what was happening, and he said nothing. I asked my sister if she understood, and she said she didn't. I asked your children if they needed anything, and they only shrugged.

And it was then that I wondered if you had ever been what we had thought, if you could have ever been what we so desperately needed. The christened figure for all of us, the centrality to a creed we no longer shared—you could feel the schisms running deeply throughout as every bond became different denominations to the story no one knew how to tell anymore—had left us necrotic, like Lazarus four days dead, untouched by his prince. And then we would be there together, a family of corpses standing for every one lying down, looking at that old oaken box holding the image of what you should have been (you were only an icon now), and we would listen to that clothed man proselytizing on and on about the virtues of you, all the while we would stand there together, hand-in-hand (but with arms crossed), shoulder-to-shoulder (with words crossed), side-to-side (with hopes and visions and revelations crossed), and we would look down into that aging box before us and see you lying there in purple, that beautiful hue, the color of royalty (it only sickened when adorned on you), and we would sing our holiest praises on and on and on until they became nothing more than liturgical phrases, devoid of the meaning they once held.

"One-in-a-million," they would call you.

"She was a fighter," you could hear.

"A good person," I would be told.

Those people, those hundreds of people. They would gather for every milestone, every fundraiser, every procession, and for every vigil. Peters and Pauls and Jameses who would tell anyone who would listen about what it was that you would mean and what you would decide in your absence. I only bore witness to the good deeds they assumed, the parts of themselves that they made through you. Self-appointed apostles. Purple ribbons on every lapel like their own personal crosses to bear, they stood watch over you as a congregation of believers, believing altogether in the miracle of you. When they looked to me from their good works and asked me where I fit in, I told them I didn't know.

I didn't know where to look.

After three days, when that little piece of all of us that was named after you called out hopefully for its lost love, I went to look for you. We waited for you to rise like rain again, to fall down from the cross you had been crucified to (how else to explain

the holes in your skin?), to come from your tomb and tell us to hush hush, peace was with us now, and also with you. I searched all of the rooms of your house. I searched all of your favorite places. It'd been so long since I'd seen you, like years now that never were, that I just didn't know where to look. I just knew that I wanted to see you, to find you, to tell you everything you had missed, to see you laugh at something again, to hear you teach me one of those millions of parables that I didn't know, the things only you could have, the secrets that you knew.

"I miss her," I told my father.

"I miss her, too," he said to me.

"Do you think she'll ever come back?" I asked.

I never got an answer from him. And I don't know why I keep asking, but I do. One pain transferred by blood to another, the assumption of guilt borne full. We're trapped here forever now, languishing in that limbo between what it was that you meant and what it was that we only thought you did. To hear you again, to have you back, could set right the lonely infinity to come, to show us all what we were supposed to take away from all of this. How good it all could be, if you rose again like we thought you would.

I didn't know how to speak.

After it was over and you were only an idea once again, I was with the man you left me with, that man who had been my father, left with the boy who had been his son, empty (both) from the spirit that had once conspired to keep them together. The two of us you left behind, we now had to explain to each other what it was that you meant to either, and saw that we couldn't.

"Where were you? Where were you all that time?" he asked.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"That's not enough," he said.

As we looked into that box I saw all that I could remember of you, and I wished then that you would come back, if but only for a moment, I would have shown you all of the lines on your face, the lines that were never there before, the lines etched permanently now into your skin that spoke in a past language (long dead), like ancient carvings in an even more ancient stone, about how you, this woman (they called you Christ, a name I didn't recognize), how much you meant to me and me alone, and how much I needed you to mean to me. I would have told you all and everything to keep you there for a little longer, to keep you long enough to notice that I couldn't speak, that there was nothing I could say, nothing that would make it better, and nothing that would bring any of you back, because I wished in

that moment that you would come back, hoped against hope you could be there to judge all of us again, like you would all those times before, I wished you were there to translate my silence to a family who silence inspired, but you weren't.

I didn't know what to do.

All those long, long nights you spent in a bed that wasn't yours with only your brother to keep you safe. I told myself that it would be tomorrow. Tomorrow I would come, and tomorrow I would say all of those things you wanted to hear. I would tell you I loved you and know that that was all you needed, just to hear that I loved you, that now you could pull all of those painful tubes from your arms and take those thin needles from your even thinner veins and you could be cured and we could laugh at how silly all of that was, how silly it was for those people to worry and call you those names, and how silly it was for those doctors to tell you all of those long, cold things when all you need to hear was "I love you." But I didn't. Tomorrows stretched on forever without ever knowing today and today became months and I still didn't see you.

"Where have you been? She needs you," my father would scream at me.

"Don't yell at him, it's fine, she understands," my mother would say.

"Please, take me to see her, I need you to do this," my sister would plead.

But I didn't. Please don't be mad, I wanted to so badly, but by the time I did you were someone else, someone I couldn't see you in, and I was so, so scared. When I finally saw you I saw them canonizing you and I didn't know what it was that I was supposed to do. A name in all the tongues I couldn't pronounce. When I came to see you, you were gone. An indentation on the bed where you would sit, beers in the fridge where you would drink, a car doomed to sit in the driveway forever. No more, no more. I called to these empty images, asked them to reveal to me the woman inspired by them. I cried to the bed and the bottle, I begged myself to the car. They didn't miss you.

I didn't know how to stop them.

We all held our hands to catch you, and we couldn't understand why you wouldn't hold, why your form fell between our fingers. No one noticed when I stopped trying and started only watching, watching as they all held out all of their fingers netted together trying to catch the melting, waxen figure that had become you. All that time they knew we were losing you.

"When she's better," it had started.

"When it's over," you once told.

“When she’s gone,” we now said.

As you were lying there, I couldn’t help but notice them carving the hardened wax of you into pieces, calling each a relic of the saint we all remembered, except for those of us who didn’t, wouldn’t, anymore. And as you stayed up sleepless, we did, too, all of us children, every day becoming aged and old like those beloved who preceded us, those beloved who were leaving us, and we wanted to call out for you. You could have heard your name in the silence between us, and you could have called out, too. We sat up together listening most nights for your breath carried by a breeze to cull us from our bedrooms to come, to see you once before you had to go. All of us, children no more, eyes averted, stared instead at the ground between us, wondering who would be the first to speak, the first to be possessed by your ghost, to come forth and bring you to the others. None of us ever did.