

Hickory Miles

HICKORY MILES – A woman in her 80’s. Sensuous, seductive, forthright, trouble.

PAWN SHOP OWNER – A man.

*HICKORY sits in a pawn shop in a small town in the south.*

*It is a new business. It is the present. HICKORY is in the middle of telling a story.*

HICKORY

Do you got a cigarette?

*OWNER gives her one.*

Do you got a light?

*OWNER gives her one.*

And then my daddy hit bottom. Shows me the bank book. I was nine, so I done arithmetic. I knew what it meant. And to that, the repossession men come knocking on the door. Pretty soon they’re pounding on the door, making the door shake, the house shake and all the stuff on the walls that he didn’t get around to selling, the spice cupboard, the lamp shades, the pictures, the books on the shelves, they’re falling to the ground and we’re living in the trash and the drapes beaten off their rods and cinnamon and all spice dusting everything. And the repossession men cawing in through the mail slot, “You got 6 days before we come repossess you.”

And to that Daddy took to his bed. Pulled the threadbare army blanket over him. Lay like that with the men pounding on the door every morning. And Daddy's just howling, howling. "I'm tapping bone," he's saying, "tapping the bone." And to that I start packing. I'm putting everything down in paper sacks and carrying them to the car – mamma's necklace, the spurs, the magnifying glass, and the tin box with the picture of the sea woman. But there's more than I can shove in the car. Anyway, they take all I bagged up, because it's in the car and they repossess the car – just drive it off early 'cause they know we ain't going to surprise them with any kind of sudden payment. And to that a black hole open up inside of me. A pit that sucks me up inside itself and leaves me dizzy.

And it gets to be like four days and three days, and Daddy's lying useless as wet kindling. The hole gets bigger with each time the men caw through the mail slot and with each piece of us going crashing to the floor. And they repossess his tools out of the shed, and the three bald tires he got hanging up there and our two lawn chairs. And by then, the hole is about all of me, cracking my stomach and making my bones ache. And then it gets to the day.

Daddy breaks from his room, climbs up on a ladder, gets up to the roof and he's howling, howling. And I see the dust of the trucks coming down our road and one, two, three trucks fold out of the cloud into our drive. And the men climb out, break the door down, and crash into the house, and just rake our stuff out. When the

floors' bare, they hammer the door shut for good and all, and put up a notice over it about this home is in repossession now and they say they're going to call the police if Daddy doesn't come down. And they're toying with me saying they're going to get a hose and shoot him off the roof with a spray of water. That's when I come at them, my teeth bared. And at that they're threatening to toss me in the truck to go with them to the land where everything's repossessed. And I'm thinking you take me, and that's it. If I'm repossessed and this house is repossessed and my daddy's repossessed, then I got nothing, and never will have nothing, and never could have nothing. And I know that I am going to fall into that pit of black hole itself and Daddy not going to do a damn thing about it.

*The emotion takes her and she speaks in tongues for a few moments. It is wild, touching, and frightening. She finishes. A pause, while this sinks in.*

That day I come to know the touch of God on my tongue. He flung me high, and His voice knocked me hard. But I come to know that I am not a woman of glass or crockery. I saved my daddy. I did that at least. I scared the men so bad they got my daddy down. And they set him on the walk, and gave him the army blanket back. And one of them said we could keep the coats we were wearing, although his boss wasn't going to like it. He waited until Daddy had the presence to say, "Thank you." before he climbed in his truck.

My daddy found work in another state, and to that I began my life over again in the home of my mother's cousin not far from where I'd lived. There was no "far" back then. The world was the size of a hand. My aunt was gentle and she loved me, but everything she ever given me, I questioned her. Where'd it been taken from? And whose it had belonged to? And when would they be back for it? And this, in time, made her tired of me and she cut me with her tongue, and then I did to her, and so I moved on.

It's getting late. Let me tell you about my husbands and then we will conclude this business.

Truth - I didn't have much spit for husbands. There weren't a lot of men to choose from. I had four of them - Buddy when I was 16. Then, in various times after that: Clive, Soren, and Lancaster who came from out St. Christopher way. All I asked was they have a car. For now I spent my days looking in every place those repossession men might have stashed my stuff, and I was tired of making the rounds on foot.

I found Mama's necklace at a church sale during the Second World War. And when I got it home, I sewed it into my pillow. And the spurs I got in Harrisburg at a pawn shop in 1963 right after John Kennedy was shot. They're under the floorboards in the hall. The magnifying glass - I come across that in the house of a woman I cleaned for. Claimed it had been in her family, but I knew her people weren't the kind to need something help them see little things. I took it out of her chiffonier. That was

around the time 9-11 happen. I ain't telling where I hid that, case she hears about it, for she is a spiteful woman.

You got another smoke?

*OWNER gives HICKORY a cigarette and a light.*

Thank you.

You know – your store here used to be my school. Can you believe it? The teacher sat there, and we sat right here. Ten, sometimes fifteen kids. I wrote with a pen had a steel nib and sharpened my pencils with a knife. Then yesterday I walk by and seen the tin box with the picture of the sea woman on it there in your window. You check me now. On the side we can't see, it's got a picture of a king in splendor. And under his throne, it got some writing – only I can't read it nor any of the words on it, nor could you 'cause the letters aren't the ones we learn. My grandmother's grandmother brought it from a country that I looked up to find it doesn't exist no more.

Yeah, you know what I'm asking. You know. I don't have even half what you want for it, not even a piece. May I touch it?

*HICKORY touches the box and it fulfills her.*

The black still creep in me. God has had need to save me many times; there's days He got to save me about every second. Sometime with a blow, sometimes with a kiss. You would think that 'cause the Lord talked through me, that ought to fill any hole, but He can only do so much. And to that, I would appreciate it if you could see yourself letting me have my box back now.

*HICKORY stares at the man in front of her until he gives her the box.*

*The lights dim out.*

*The End*