

Meanus Myles

Summar McGee

Delta blues floated through the air. Mr. Meanus hummed B.B. King's guitar solo through scattered teeth. He sat on the railing of the dingy white porch as he reached into his worn leather boots and pulled out a balled-up church program defaced with hieroglyphic scrawl. Popping the collar of his tobacco-scented flannel shirt to shield his neck from the heat, he wiped the sweat from his brow with wrinkled brown fingers, squinted at the yellow paper, and pulled a cordless phone out of his bleach-stained Levi pocket. He dialed the number and leaned back against the wooden column, tapping his foot impatiently as he waited for a response. No answer. He scowled.

"I hate when boys call for hay an don't come pick it up," Mr. Meanus mumbled under his breath.

As Mr. Meanus slid the cordless phone down his face, his pinky finger brushed the top of his right ear. He stopped. He stood statuesque moving only to run his finger on the forked portion of his right ear again and again. Meanus finally let out a phlegmy cough and flinched, ever so slightly, as he began to reminisce.

Forty-four years later and he still remembered. He remembered every detail of that day as if he were still there. He remembered the deep-set rage in Pat's glare. He remembered the pain that accompanied the wet, hot blood that poured down the side of his face, but most of all he remembered the feeling of horror he felt when he came to and saw it lying there on the floor—cold, foreign, and unattached.

Meanus and his brother, Bobby, had ridden to the juke joint to "get a lil whiskey." Meanus knew that "Pat ain't like him going to no juke joint," but he thought to himself, "I'm a grown man. A grown man can go to a juke joint an get a little whiskey if he John Brown please. I been on that plow all day, I ain't gon let no woman tell me I can't do nothing." Meanus and Bobby pushed open the back door to the juke joint and walked up to the bar.

Four hours and six shots of whiskey later, Meanus was loose and fumbling. He found himself eyeing a woman in the corner whose blouse was cut a bit too low and whose eyes looked a little too willing. Regardless, Meanus walked toward her as if he was being pushed by an invisible force. Even knowing this, he continued. As he drew closer to the woman, he recognized her by the scar on her left leg. The woman in the corner was "Juicy Jane," one of Bubba's Juke Joint's famous attractions. Meanus found himself scattin' to the beat with Jane. He put his hands around her robust waist and dipped her. Jane's legs went flying in the air as Meanus leaned in for a sloppy kiss. By then it was nearing midnight and Meanus was drenched in sweat; he wasn't quite sure whether it was from scattin' or the whiskey, but he didn't care. All Meanus knew was what felt good here and now—scattin' with Juicy Jane.

Meanus scanned the dim, musky room for his brother, Bobby. Mid-search, Jane slinked a chunky

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brown hand around two of Meanus' fingers and guided him to the bar. Meanus was just about to take another shot when a short, stout, shadowy figure pushed open the back door of the juke joint. He squinted to try to make out who it was. As the figure moved closer Meanus spotted the familiar hue

of bright pink sponge rollers. It was then that he realized that the shadowy figure was his wife, Pat. A wave of belligerent explanation began to spill from his mouth. Before Meanus could get out a coherent sentence, he was hit with the scent of Pat's floral perfume and a strong left hook. Wailing and begging for forgiveness, Meanus struggled to get Pat off of him. Meanus attempted to grab Jane hoping that she would help him fend off the spastic punches. As Meanus started moving towards the door, Pat's punches began to slow, which in Meanus' experience meant that Pat was calming down and would be willing to talk over the situation soon. So naturally Meanus headed back toward Pat and wrapped his hands around her waist

for an embrace—hoping she would be overcome by his sincerity and forgive him. Pat stopped flailing in Meanus' arms, her breath hot against his ear as she whispered something soft and slow. Just as Meanus pulled her in close—believing things had turned around for him—he felt something clamp down on the top of his right ear. Sudden, explosive pain pushed him into unconsciousness. Meanus was alone; beside him on the floor lay a bloody piece of gristle.

Now Meanus rocked back on the porch railing gritting his teeth and humming louder than ever to drown out his thoughts, his body shaken and worn from the memory. This time, though, it was just him and the Blues. No Pat. No whiskey. No Jane. And no ear. ▲



Ventus

Katelyn Jackson

Photography



The Receiver

Gianni Stennis

Honorable Mention—Photography

Tough Love

Michelle Li

The limp vegetable floats in murky broth
like a bloated corpse in swamp water.

“Eat it now,” you demand,
words staccato, tone harsh.

I scrunch my nose, lips pressed together tight.

Thwap.

Chopsticks smack the back of my hand
sharp and severe

like your eyes when they gaze upon
the first “B” I make in Biology.

I try to tell you it’s the highest grade in my class
but the furrow remains between your brows,
and I lose my phone for two weeks.

“Again,” you command,
as my sore fingers protest against ivory keys
and my vision swims with F-sharps and half-notes.

I hit the right chords, finally,
but you just point to the next measure.

“Claire’s mom let *her* go to the party!” I whine,
fingers fisting the new dress I bought for the occasion.

You shrug, voice cold,
“You are not Claire.”

Mascara streaking down flushed cheeks,
I run from the living room,

“I wish I was, so I wouldn’t have you as a mother!”

You slip into my room later that night,
and I pretend to be asleep
as you tuck the covers around my chin,
press a lingering kiss to my temple,
and in the darkness

framed by slivers of moonlight,
I understand the words you can’t say.

The next day, Claire is sick with alcohol poisoning.