

**Young's Literal Translation,** Latorial Faison  
*Virginia's Best Emerging Poets*, January 2020

Mama lived vicariously  
    through *Tidewaters News*,  
*The Virginian Pilot*,  
    and every word of God.  
She believed  
    Luke seventeen and two,  
For it is the gospel.  
    She pictured it—  
Her poor, Black self  
    drowning in the Nottoway River  
Millstone about her neck,  
    Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

**Mama Sang the Blues**, Latorial Faison  
*Southern Poetry Anthology IX*, January 2021

I.

Mama's bottle tested illusion. Therein was a holy water from a great river that healed the sick, raised the dead. She sipped small sips with her wise black lips, hummed hymns nice & slow, in & out of contralto, like Mahalia. *Tell the angels that I'm on my way*, toe tapping, head rocking & all hard working, poor & saved.

Bittersweet like a one-room school, she came together like an old Negro textbook—missing pages yet heaven sent. The god of white evil couldn't have created a strong, Black woman like this. Like a daystar, she appeared in indigo skies, orphaned & unknown.

From a dying womb to a tenant room, she came like a blonde-haired, blue-eyed baby Jesus in a brown-skinned country; it *didn't make no sense*. The poison she picked—a balm that delivered her from evil, from lying white tongues to the lynching of black sons.

Mama grew stronger than Samson on Friday nights every time she stole away to grab pieces of her humanity back. It was a happy sadness that dealt in systemic pain. For when white folk got your tongue, you can't tell nobody but Jesus & when Jesus got you Singing like Mahalia, you can't trust nobody but God.

II.

Mama was serious about her religion, the Baptist church down the dirt road & choir rehearsals on Thursday nights. With songbooks, hand-written notes & a third grade education, she impressed her own self.

Standing in the choir on the promises of God, all robed & righteous, she was worth more than white women. Her voice, like a whippoorwill, could whistle a song all through a dark night, all through the struggle.

When she sang from her midnight, I knew she was light. Mama was a voice of scarred mahogany brown reason—calling out to god, crying out for freedom. I listened with every hope & horror that had ever come between us.

She sculpted me into me with a melody she hummed through all kinds of hell. Mama was a skilled nuance, a black renaissance inhaling & impaling grief, exhaling peace of mind, a piece of mine.

She was a professor of arts & letters & god quilting me with all the pieces she was. Like every strong black woman whoever was a warrior, whoever came before her, she came bearing gifts, serenading with songs. They came; she came; I, too, have come—to raise the dead.

**A Shroud for Mother's Day**, Latorial Faison  
PRAIRIE SCHOONER, January 2020

It takes me twenty-four hours to grieve a mother's—day gone wrong after  
twenty-one years of finger-painted hands on pastels, four-year-old faces  
peeking from the center of my world & die-cut flowers in preschool gardens.  
It takes me twenty-four hours to grieve a mother's day gone wrong without  
human touch, a hi mom, or hug, not an egg scrambled with cheese or love.  
It takes me twenty-four hours to grieve a mother's day gone  
without my not so grown, but gone sons who breathe this  
air I gave—like it's a free for all, like it's free—to all, like it's—free.  
It takes me twenty-four hours to grieve a mother's day gone wrong,  
nobody I gave life—stopping to remember what I stopped living for.

**Judas Kiss**, Latorial Faison  
*Artemis Journal, Vol XXVIII, 2021*

Sleeping in black man-caves alone & silenced like  
hogs tied to slaughter at birth, eyes  
wide shut by un-holy un-Black people with  
money poison & guns uniformed daily  
daily unveiled we sing praises while we hug while  
we forgive this white America wipe away  
the shame Judas-kiss ourselves to hell all righteous forsaken