

Hand in Hand

By ML deLloyd

940 words

*Hand in hand they braced the hard driven rain
Shoes hanging to the splintered breaking ship
A boat from Astoria sent to be of help
But arrives too late for the 42 now slain.*

*The General Warren scuttled off Clatsop Spit
The Captain ordered it run upon the bar
The newlyweds go below to save their goods
The last to know their grievous fate commit.*

He flipped the soggy, lace petticoat into a more modest position. The toe of his hobnail boot painterly in its goal of a restful tableau. He tilted her head just so. Her hand he left in the hand of her new husband. The two; corpses on the beach. Together forever.

“Stop that Jerrod! Why are you always doing that?” said Arthur, sitting on nearby driftwood.

“It’s just. It’s just. Well, I wish I coulda died that way, holding my girl’s hand.”

“You never had a girl.”

“I know, that’s just it. I wish I coulda.” He reached down to the dead girl’s hand, interlacing his fingers with hers. “I never held a real live girl’s hand. At home, that’s not how

Hawaiian boys does. I woulda like to die like this here instead of the way they done it, sending us to drown, one after another, in leaky boats.

“The day was fine. Weren’t no reason for us to die. Nary a wind. The water looked black, muscle dark, bulging, like we was sitting on a walloping snake that was makin’ it’s way to the ocean. Sent to take soundings in a leaky whaleboat. The idiot Captain. We weren’t the only ones the Tonquin killed.

“I just wish I coulda died like that. I wish I coulda lived like that,” continued Jerrod, as the family on the beach, towing bright orange and pink beach chairs, a huge umbrella, and an ice chest on wheels walked unhindered through him. They stopped in front of Arthur and began laying a beach blanket, “Honey, put the shade screen here for the baby!”

“Shade screen! Ha ha ha! I’m a shade! I’m a shade!” Jerrod danced around them, but then gave up because it just wasn’t fun anymore.

“Oh, come on, Jerrod, let’s move down here a little way,” and they moved out of the path of the romping family.

*Below they hear the breaking planks. And in
The water rushes high, full foaming spray
No longer below, but standing on the bar
They hadn’t moved at all. The ship left them.*

“I blame Lewis and Clark,” said Arthur. “Just think, if Lewis and Clark had never made it here, you and I would be alive. So would that happy couple there.” He looked up to the wide spanse of water in front of him, where he could see the shadows of all the ships lost and humans killed at this deadly spot. Ship after ship, some superimposed on top of each other, hulls cracked open, some upside down, some just a pile of floating planks. Eerie penumbrous bodies littered the sea, some floating, some tucked in, sleeping on the seabed; old, wooly-

dressed white men and babies; Filipinos and Hawaiians, Chinese; women holding young children to their kisses. "It would have stopped the carnage for 50 years, and 'twere carnage. Yes. I blame Lewis and Clark."

"Well, you're the educated one. I believe you. Not that it changes anything now. No one was holding my hand when I died. My ma never knowed what happened to me.

"I bailed and bailed. I were the last one bailing. Then I thought I might be able to swim to shore, but I couldn't. The current, it kept sweeping me to the ocean and I thought, 'Out there I will never get back.' I was so tired, every time I went to rest, floating, I would lose the distance I'd made. It musta been hours. It was dark. I tried to swallow some water. I was thirsty. My arms wouldn't work any more. I just swallowed water. And coughed. And swallowed and coughed. Until I was breathing water in and out. I only did that about three times. I thought a' my mum. Then I got all peaceful and hot. Very hot. The sun shined right in my eyes, blinding me. So white and warm."

"Ew! Ew! This is good! I need this for my poem! I don't remember dying. I got hit in the head by the mast so I was not awake to notice I was drowning. Good! This is good!"

"What you writing a poem for? What can you do with a poem?"

"Haven't you noticed we're still here and all the others who died are gone? Maybe we are supposed to do something here. Be witnesses to this. Or for this. Besides, I like writing poetry. Especially about death. I know about death. It is my especiality! We'll go no more a roving! —Maybe I can get it into FisherPoets!"

"You are not a fisherman."

"I fished once!"

"How on this Lord's earth are you gonna do it? You gonna say it is from Poet, Arthur L Sturnbridge, Wapping, England, 1851?"

“No, I’m going to go whisper it in some fisherman’s ear! You wait and see!”

“Can you ask them to put up a memorial for us with our names while you are there?
This place never woulda been settled without us. Do sound fair.”

“They can’t..... they don’t know our names.”

Hand in hand they braced the hard driven rain

And hand in hand they died an early death

Forever together to witness nature’s call

Forever here for all that does remain.