The Hollow

Roy Proctor





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THE HOLLOW

By Roy Proctor

CAST

LLOYD HARRIS: Early 70s, comfortably built, grandfatherly, nice-looking, the image of a successful small-town North Carolina businessman in his declining years. He has become accustomed to being a big fish in a small pond. He wears expensive casual clothing that denotes no particular season or activity.

CLAY BANKS: Early 70s, still in good shape, but showing the effects of too much partying and too much Southern California sun. He's the image of a man who has tried to keep up appearances but whose dreams were never fulfilled. He dresses Southern California casual, perhaps in shorts, subdued Hawaiian shirt, flip-flops. His boyhood Southern accent has flattened out over a lifetime spent mostly outside the South.

Place

Shady Grove, N.C., and Los Angeles, California

Time

May to August

Playwright's notes on staging

The letters and post cards in "*The Hollow*" are intended to be read, not memorized, but that doesn't take the actors off the hook. The actors should be so familiar with them that they can embody the words and establish occasional eye contact with the audience, but NEVER with each other until the final moments of the play…The author believes the play would be enhanced by lighting the reader of each letter in turn as specified in the

script; however, "*The Hollow*" can be -- and has been --presented successfully with no changes in lighting. . . . . Directors with the resources might consider projecting several slides of adolescent boys playing in a hollow, as described in the play, in that final moment between the time the music starts and when Lloyd and Clay look at each other for the first time. Such slides, fading into each other, should bring the characters full-circle and give audiences a renewed appreciation of the preciousness of life.

Setting: *Lloyd's space is stage right; Clay's space, stage left. Lloyd's space consists of a wingback chair on a small Oriental rug; the chair is flanked by an end table with a lamp, a conventional push-button, land-line telephone, a high school class reunion booklet, perhaps a framed photo of grandchildren, and other objects reflecting Lloyd's comfortable station in life. Clay's space includes a patio chair and a table beside it with a cell phone and a modern plastic floor lamp. Lloyd's space bespeaks tradition and permanence; Clay's space, transience. Except for these two character-defining areas, the stage is bare.*

Beginning: *Late 1950's music, perhaps The Platters' "The Great Pretender" or another pop hit that a DJ would have spun at a 1957 high school prom, plays just before the house lights dim. Lights up on Lloyd's space. It is early afternoon in Shady Grove. Lloyd enters with the day's mail, sorts through it, sits down and places all but one of the letters on the table. He opens the one letter and begins to read. As he reads silently, lights dim on him, but not to the point where his reactions to what he is reading cannot be perceived by the audience. Simultaneously, lights rise on Clay sitting in his patio chair with the same letter in his hand. It is late morning in Los Angeles.*

CLAY: Dear Lloyd,

Thank you so much for inviting me to your house after the reunion. Your party was the high point of my trip east. The banquet was great, but names and faces whizzed past me in that blur of rock 'n' roll. Without the photos on those nametags, I'd have been lost. At your house, classmates began to come into focus. Wrinkles flattened out. Fifty-five years peeled away. I felt like I was back in high school again. It was a good feeling, Lloyd. I especially appreciated the chance to reconnect with you, no matter how briefly. I assumed I had been banished from that house forever. Now a part of my life has come full circle in a very special way. Please let me know, Lloyd, if you ever head to LA. Thanks again to you and Emily for a terrific evening.

As ever,

Clay

Lights dim on Clay and rise on Lloyd, who proceeds to read aloud the letter he has written Clay while Clay opens the same letter, pulls it out of its envelope and begins to read and react silently to what he is reading. The same pattern of the writer reading his letter aloud, the recipient opening his envelope and reading the same letter silently is followed throughout the play.

LLOYD: Dear Clay,

Why didn't you tell me you were coming? We could have gotten together for lunch. I could have given you the royal tour of all that's changed since we were boys. Shady Grove is the sort of small, tree-shaded North Carolina town where, the more things change, the more they stay the same. The Confederate soldier continues to stand sentinel on his pedestal in Courthouse Square, and we're supposed to feel secure.

Dad walled in the garden after I went to Duke. He added the swimming pool soon after Emily and I got married. (I guess he had visions of grandchildren dancing in his head.) He turned the house over to Emily and me when he and Mother retired to Sarasota, but not before building that guest wing overlooking the pool. He and Mother wanted a private place to stay when they came back to visit.

Except for the guest wing, the house hasn't changed much since we were growing up. Emily and I stored most of our furniture when we moved in. We wanted to settle down before we decided what to keep. That was twenty-five years ago, and most of our furniture is still in storage. We even kept Mother's maid and gardener. Now that our kids are long gone, this house is too big for us. We know that. The only time we fill it is when our kids and their broods return for Christmas or in the summer. We've thought about downsizing to a cottage in a retirement community, but that's a step we're not ready to take. What if we changed our minds? We'd never get this house back.

So when are you coming back to Shady Grove, Clay? I owe you that lunch and tour, and we have a lot of catching up to do. Are you still acting? You'd get a write-up in the *Tribune* every time you were in one of those beach party pictures. They'd always explain that hometown boy Clay Everhart had turned into movie star Clay Banks. But that was so long ago. I can't remember the last time I saw you on TV.

Take care of yourself, my long-lost friend, and keep in touch.

Best,

Lloyd

Lights dim on Lloyd, rise on Clay.

CLAY: Dear Lloyd,

As it turns out, I gave myself the royal tour before I returned the car to the airport. So many deserted factories. The hosiery mill where Mama worked is a vacant lot full of weeds. The house where I grew up has vanished, too. Those little company houses have been replaced by a project. My old street, which they used to oil in the summer to settle the dust, has been paved. At least Mama's beloved Pentecostal Holiness church looks the same, but with a fresh coat of paint.

I couldn't resist walking down into the hollow between your house and ours. Our rope swings are long gone. Remember swinging from tree to tree bellowing like Tarzan? Our tree house has vanished, too. So has the log bridge we built. So have the paths that led down to the creek. I found a rusted iron pipe embedded in a large tree. It may have been the pipe I used for chin-ups, but I'm not sure. Do you ever go down there, Lloyd? It's a mess. Trash everywhere. Old tires and appliances and rusted machinery. The water burbles over about as many beer cans as rocks in the creek.

But nature seems to be trying to reclaim its own. The rushing water still sparkles. Birds sing. Butterflies flutter by. Ivy and honeysuckle are doing their best to hide the litter. Remember how we used to cut grapevines, light them up and pretend they were cigarettes? I wasn't tempted to do that again, but I did pull the stamens out of some honeysuckle to taste the nectar. It was just as sweet as I remembered it.

Thanks for asking about the acting. I learned to surf, hung out on the beaches, found a job as a lifeguard, waited tables, and got lucky soon after I arrived in LA. But when the beach party pictures faded, my showbiz prospects faded, too. Casting directors kept telling me I was the Tab Hunter type. Trouble was, Tab Hunter got here first. He found his place in the Hollywood sun. I didn't, but it wasn't for lack of trying. I moved out here determined not to be a face in the crowd. I guess I ended up a body on the beach. I gave acting my best shot, took a few classes, but never learned enough, I guess. I thought Hollywood needed another kid with sun-bleached hair, pearly whites, a golden tan and six-pack abs. It didn't. Young guys like me were a dime a dozen. People kept telling me that being good-looking wasn't enough. I had to be *interesting* looking. Memorable looking. I had to have some special something that would set me apart from every other young guy, and I never figured out what it was. Maybe you had it or didn't

and there was nothing you could about it. Maybe I wasn't aggressive enough. Maybe I didn't kiss enough ass or whatever other part of the anatomy presented itself.

I should have gone to college, but that wasn't in the cards for the son of a mill worker who never graduated from high school and raised her only child alone. At least Mama was proud of me until the day she died. In her eyes, I was always her son the movie star. I dreamed of making enough money to move her out here. I wanted to set her up in a little apartment and give her an allowance so she'd never have to run a knitting machine another day in her life. But it never happened. I did fly her out here once. I sent her money when I could. I visited her after she moved in with her sister in Atlanta when I could scrape up the airfare. God, I loved Mama. I miss her.

Mama liked you, Lloyd, even if your family were Whiskypalians, in her Holiness eyes. She used to joke that we lived on the wrong side of the creek, but she thought you were a good influence. She couldn't understand why our friendship ended in the 10th grade, and I could never tell her. I could never tell anybody.

Why am I telling you all this, Lloyd? I honestly don't know, but it feels good. You're right. We have a lot of catching up to do. I shouldn't wait so long to come back to Shady Grove

Take care, old pal.

Clay

Lights dim on Clay, rise on Lloyd.

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