

Bluegrass Accolade

BCTC Literary Journal - Issue No. 5



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CONTENTS

CONTEST

BCTC "In Your Words" Poetry Contest

Winner (Faculty/Staff Category)		
A Rock's Loudness	Jaclyn Hawkins	5
Winner (Student Category)		
Soliloquy	Elizabeth Kilcoyne	6

POETRY

Goat	Don Boes	7
If I Had a Sister	Don Boes	8
My Daughter's First Baseball Game	Don Boes	9
Birthing My Brother	James B. Goode	10
Hoping Not to Fast Forward Back	James B. Goode	11
Little Bird	Jasmine Johnson	12
In Red Dresses	Melissa Jones	13
I	Elizabeth Kilcoyne	14
Throughout Outer Space	LaTosha Pence	16
Da' Rag Man	James Poole	17
Fish's Dream	James Poole	18
A Thing or Two	Tyler Wood	19
Valentine's Day Message	Tyler Wood	20

FICTION

The Old Clock	Anne Harover	21
Picture of Forgiveness	James Gardner	27
The Better Angels of Our Nature	Roger L. Guffey	45
The Dream	Susan Slocum	56
Delacroix's Cigarettes	Nate Smith	61

ART

Left of the Enchanted Forest	Jewell Burton	63
Hand-Man	Jewell Burton	64

Untitled	Shawn Gannon	65
Untitled	Shawn Gannon	66
Shaker Chair	Roger L. Guffey	67
Spider	Tiffany Horton	68
The Overcoming	Britney Kershaw	69
Wonder	Britney Kershaw	70

NOTES

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors	71
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2011-2012 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

Chair: Maureen Cropper **Members:** Don Boes, Charles Coulston, Angie Davis, Kevin Jensen, Daniel Livingston, Tammy Ramsey, Mary Rouse, and Dan Schuman

JACLYN HAWKINS

A Rock's Loudness

Hollowed pupils let life travel
inward, the greens of moss that explode
reach my retina and shimmer
in the morning's dew. White tail to the left,
a deer, startled, bounds. Flash
of brown, stills. Doe eyes to dewy
grounds through green
eyes of mine.

He fell into romance with
a juniper, courting her branches
and blue berries as a gentleman caller to prove
that not all men who enter
are evil.

Eastern bluebirds waltz
upon the wind, water drip drops
down limestone walls, a parade with no
leader and no end. I was beautiful
to him then, but no woman can compete
with Mother Earth.

Corroded rocks crumble
between fingers in seconds, shaped
in deep time to be grated
away by me?
Place palm to rock,
my apologies.

ELIZABETH KILCOYNE

Soliloquy

"you're not
killing yourself
in my favorite shirt."

i am talking to you
through the white
painted wood
of the bathroom door
as the sun rises over
this scene of late-teenage
domesticity.

the door creaks open.
i move out of the way.
watch you pace
the hallway, feet
pad across oatmeal
carpeting.

i watch your fingers
play with the hem
of a shirt, which,
before today,
i didn't love.

inhale

you bite
into the skin
of your thumb.

exhale

"then i'll take it off."

DON BOES

Goat

I grab your sloppy postcards
as they slide through the slot
and consider your last kiss over the phone.
My three fingers of whiskey
stare at me like a tethered goat.
Cramped and foolish, I anticipate
your arrival. I creep to the window
and drop letters in the dirt,
missives scratched on candy wrappers
and sealed in wallpaper envelopes.
I address each one to you, care of me.

DON BOES

If I Had a Sister

she would appreciate
the veracity of a mermaid
and why such a creature
often plays a part
in our lesser
dream-like dreams:
flea markets,
tattoos, t-shirts,
postcards, and cartoons.

My sister would listen to that voice
as a way to remember
what it was like
for us to be kids
and what it was like
to have parents
who were alive.

She would be a woman now
and the legend of the family—
if I had a sister
I would swear
by what she sang.

DON BOES

My Daughter's First Baseball Game

It's a long season. And without a clock
time is measured by balls and strikes
and nobody succeeds without leaving home.
That's why hot dogs are cheap
and the mascot signs autographs in the bleachers.
Tonight we sit on the third base line
and root for the home team.

If they don't win, it's a shame.
She's eight years old and I've waited
all her life to buy these tickets. For hours
we watch the sun drop below the expressway
as the contest ranges inning by inning
across the valuable turf of late summer.
The score is close. She's past her bedtime.

Between pitches, I don't say anything.
She learns all she needs to know
about turning the double play
and going to the opposite field.

After the final out, the old ball game is over.
We admire the groundskeepers
who pull up the bases and rake the infield dirt.
I don't care if we never get back.

JAMES B. GOODE

Birthing My Brother

She is standing beside me
in the bathtub
blousing, vertical-stripped shift dress
body like a cushaw
skinny, slender neck
curved above her bulging belly

This, her fifth
water gushing forth
like from the dams we built and breached as kids
on Looney Creek
near our coal camp house.
17 and scared
as if I were the child
bursting into the world
and seeing all this for the first time
I saw her measured look
experience in her steeling eyes
squeezed to dark dots
sharp Native American nose with nostrils spread
in red flesh circles
pinched mouth telling me to go
to the miner's bathhouse at Rock Tunnel.
Telling me to tell the Superintendent
get Daddy from 10 miles underground
when you get back
I'll be cleaned up
and ready for you to take me to Doc Mullins.
All I could do
was drive blindly
up the curving road
and hope I was finally
going to have the brother I had always wanted.

JAMES B. GOODE

Hoping Not to Fast Forward Back

Right now
I'm hoping that my problems from the past
Don't return.
I have a completely different set
Which are more than adequate to fill my time.
I can do without facial blemishes,
Legs that are too long for my pants,
Or a cowlick that can't be controlled.
I have come to prefer those hidden deep within--
Emotional scars, if I have to choose.
No less painful,
But at least the public doesn't have to share the burden.
A friend once said he wasn't going to get divorced--
"I'd just be swapping one set of problems for another.
I'd prefer to keep this set--
at least with these I know what to expect."
Presently, I can shoulder these.
They seem to fit
Like an old familiar winter coat.
I'm sure more are on the way,
But I'll not be looking.
They'll just appear.
Meanwhile, if you will excuse me,
I'll continue with my current debate
Is "Life is one damn thing after another"
As Elbert Hubbard disciples relate?
Or
Is it ". . . one damned thing over and over?"
As Edna St. Vincent Millay followers
Have come to discover?

JASMINE JOHNSON

Little Bird

Little bird, little bird,
quiet now your song
the dusk here now lingers,
with night rises dawn.

Little bird, little bird,
you sing far too long
in moonlight be silenced,
arise with the sun.

MELISSA JONES

In Red Dresses

I think of you
in Pepsi bottles,
red dresses and
popsicles;
I think of you
In four leaf clovers
and juicy fruit gum.
In wading creeks and
soft sand; 3 soldiers of play
in carefree days and shining sun.

ELIZABETH KILCOYNE

I

light
filters through the window
too heavy.
muffles my breath. my next

exhale

fogs the glass

exhale

and i swallow up the room.
carbon monoxide
leaks from my fingers
trail them lazy over my lips
trace the jagged
curve of tooth.

here is morning, leaking
from under the blinds,
swimming in the fish tank
peaking from the crack
in the curtain.
morning stains my sheets
tugging them
from clenched fists.

so this is my body
these are my bones
spider veins climbing my legs.

this is my blood
running under the skin
these are scabs
when my cup runs over.

this is the stilling of my hands
these are my chest pains
this is morning in september.

when i tell you
i am not getting out of bed today
it means something different
than it did yesterday.

LaTosha Pence

Throughout Outer Space

Space
Explosions...
Imagine the time
When light, space, matter
Have yet to unfold
And then created
Speeding matter
Flying million kites around
Whirling and twirling
Flashes and bangs
Without a sound
So many colors
Galaxies floating
Universe changes
By each golden
Picture we take
Above and fading
Down and expanding
And vice versa

JAMES POOLE

Da' Rag Man

Da' Rag Man come; on silent feet.
Him collect you up and sing yo' soul ta' sleep.

Behol' da' dwarf; him pale as can be.
Him time is short; da' Rag Man come to sing him soul to sleep.

Da' midda-aged stars; dey lament and weep.
Dey' kno' da' Rag Man come ta sing dey souls to sleep.

Da' new born stars; all bright blu' an' replete
Dey don't hear the Rag Man come ta sing dey souls to sleep.

Da rag man come across time so deep.
Him eat the stars and sing dey souls to sleep.

Him devoured da' red giant from head to feet.
Swallowed him whole while him sing his soul to sleep.

Him breath is a whisper him touch so sweet.
Him don't come to love you him come to sing your soul to sleep.

Da rag man come to be a long time ago.
Him was king of all; like a god like Apollo

Him see all y'all be born and rejoice and weep.
Him kno' it's a matter of time when him sing your soul ta sleep.

So listen chilrin' and listen deep.
Da' Rag Man come; on silent feet.

Him collect you up with a song so sweet.
while him tuck you in forever and sing yo' soul ta' sleep.

JAMES POOLE

Fish's Dream

I long to swim the deep waters of your seas
again; and taste the salt of your thoughts on my tongue
and know where they began.

I have journeyed long in constant quest
of you; through endless waters over canyon and valley
and deepest trenches too.

I feel you still don't know me; and this fills me with dread;
I'm filled with disappointment; I'm forlorn, in your eyes
surely I must be dead.

Then you acknowledge me again as part of your
seas; but I know you're vain;
as I drink you in, breathe you out and taste the salt
of your thoughts once again.

TYLER WOOD

A Thing or Two

I'm no teacher,
But you can learn a thing or two from me

I'm no coach,
But I will push you hard to get you where you need to be

I'm no artist,
But I can paint a picture with my poetry

I'm no Romeo,
But you can expect every kiss romantically

I'm no puzzle,
But I can't be solved easily

I don't hibernate,
But I like to sleep peacefully

I'm no wimp,
But I like to play by the rules

I'm very understanding,
But you can't use me as one of your tools

I always have way too much to do,
But I'd give it all up for you

I'm not perfect as you can see,
However, you are more than perfect for me

TYLER WOOD

Valentine's Day Message

Some say Valentine's Day is just another day,
But I would have to disagree.
It's actually my favorite holiday;
Better than a turkey, or some lit up tree.

Prepare for me at my best.
Why, a regular Romeo I shall be!
It's all about the love baby,
No need for all the candy.

Some guys may give you chocolates,
Or have flowers delivered to the door
Those things are nice,
But to me, you're worth way more

You want chocolate?
I'll give you all the love in the world, to start.
You want flowers?
Instead I'll give you something that'll last longer, my heart.

Some prefer eating somewhere fancy,
I would rather cook for you,
Yeah it may not be as great
But it is perfect for a dinner of two

Dress up nice?
Psh, that's nonsense.
You would look just as beautiful
In a T-shirt and sweats

So there you have it,
My message to you,
I hope it makes you smile
Because it's 100% true

I do have one question though
Even though you may not be technically mine,
But on this February 14th,
Will you be my Valentine?

ANNE HAROVER

The Old Clock

I remember the old clock with its smooth, wooden surface. My mother would dust it every day, and would use lemon oil to make it shine. It sat high on the wall, higher than the head of a small child of 8. It reminded me of a small house, with a set of doors under a giant clock. I would look at it to tell me when it was lunch time. A small bird would shoot out of the little house and sing to me. That was my signal.

There was a key my mother would use to wind it up. Every night, at 8 o'clock sharp, my mother would take out the small, silver key and insert it into the side of the clock. She would turn it once, twice, three times. This was usually the signal for me to go off to bed.

So imagine my surprise, some thirty years later, when again this clock falls into my hands.

I was going through everything in the house, deciding what to keep, what to throw out, when behold, from the corner of my eye, I spot the same clock. It is at eye level now, and dusty. It no longer works.

Gently I take it down and examine it closely.

"It's smaller than I remember," I murmur.

"I'm sorry, Ruth. Did you say something?"

I glance up and smile at Anna Beth as she sticks her head around the corner.

"It's the clock my mother used to use," I finger the keyhole gently. "I lost the key as a child, so it quit working."

"Couldn't you have had another key made?" her voice grows distant as she re-enters the living room. She's packing up the things I'll keep. The rest is to be auctioned off tomorrow.

"I suppose," I say. Carefully I pry open the door. The bird within seems dull and lifeless within. "We just never got around to it."

Anna Beth's face reappears from around the corner at the tone of my voice.

Her face seems rather blurred.

"Ruth?"

"I'm sorry. I promised not to cry anymore and—"

"Oh, Ruth," she takes the clock gently from my fingers and guides me to a chair. "It's hard for anyone to lose their parents. There's nothing wrong in crying."

"I know," I blow my nose in the proffered Kleenex. "but I've put it off so long, and the auction's tomorrow—oh why did there have to be so much debt? To have to sell so many things..."

"It's not like you could have kept it all," she hands me another Kleenex. "I suppose you want to keep this?" she turns the clock to examine it better. "It's a very nice clock."

"You keep it," I blurt out. It was entirely unintentional, the words just kind of came out.

"What?" Anna Beth looks surprised. "But it's such an important memory."

"Not really," I say. Immediately I wish to take it back. "Like you said, I don't really have the room, but I don't really want it auctioned off..."

"Well, if you say so," her tone sounds doubtful. "If you really don't want it then," she holds it up again and smiles as she runs her hand across the wood.

To keep it would make me too sad.

I clear my throat and stand up. "Well, let's get back to work."

The kitchen is pretty easy to go through; there is no real attachment to the various pots or pans. The same cannot be said for the dining room.

I stand looking the china cabinet up and down, wishing for the hundredth time I had a house to call my own, and not my one room loft apartment.

"I can't get rid of my mom's china," I groan.

Anna Beth stands next to me, biting her thumb in that thoughtful sort of way.

"I don't suppose it would fit in your living room..."

I snort, "Next to the TV?"

"Well you could move the TV to the corner and put the china cabinet up by the closet-

"And I'm telling you it would look horrible." I know I'm being unreasonable. I'm too tired to care.

"Well, what if you just keep the china and put it in that trunk you have, under the window?"

I sigh, "I suppose."

Anna Beth goes to find newspaper and another cardboard box or two.

Together we begin to carefully wrap up the items and place them in the box.

"What a cute tea cup," Anna Beth says admiringly.

I look over to see what she's holding and smile. "When we had guests over, that was the one my mom gave to people she didn't like. Because the china was very thin, the tea became cool quickly. It became a bit of a joke," I smile fondly at the delicate blue roses painted

on the front. "If someone began to annoy one of my parents, when it was time for tea they would say, 'Go get the blue rose tea cup, Ruth.'

"They would tell the guest how expensive and delicate such a thin tea cup was, while the guest had to grimace through lukewarm tea."

"Your parents were quite the characters." Anna Beth remarks as she wraps up the cup.

"That's not half of it. When I was ten, my mom—"

"What is it?"

I was examining something that lay hidden behind the blue rose tea cup's saucer.

"I think I found the key," I whisper.

"What?" Anna Beth leans to take a closer look.

I gently lift the tarnished silver key from its hiding place.

"I remember now." The metal is cool in my hand. "I was angry because mom told me I had to go to bed early. I was too young, she said, to stay up with the adults. So I hid it. I thought if it wasn't there, she might forget to wind up the clock at 8, and I could stay up longer.

"Only I forgot," I frown down at it. "I had forgotten where I hid it.

"Anna Beth, the clock!" my sudden urgency makes her jump.

“Get the clock Anna Beth, hurry!” In my impatience I follow her to the other room.

Before she can even pick it up, I have it cradled in my hands.

I put in the key. I turn it once, twice, three times. Nothing happens.

“Oh,” I sigh, “I had hoped—”

“Shhh!” Anna Beth shushes me. “Listen!”

I listen closely.

“Tick, tock, tick, tock.”

The faint noise seems loud in the silence.

“It works!” I’m grinning and then so is Anna Beth. “It works!” I cry.

“I changed my mind,” I say, “I’m keeping it.”

See mother? I found it, I found the key. So please, don’t be angry anymore. See, I’ve found it. I’ve found it now.

I cry, holding that dear, wooden clock to me. I could probably smell the lemon oil still on it, if my nose wasn’t so stopped up.

JAMES GARDNER

Picture of Forgiveness

The slashes were red, deep red and drying to maroon. The first few strokes are angry, primal, as though Tyler Keating had a personal vendetta against the canvases. But that was the way he painted at first. The paint was thrown on the canvases with as much abandon as Tyler once threw his fist. But it soon wouldn't be abandon that guided his hand but purpose. Once the paint was slung where he wanted it, Tyler's hand would steady, become as delicate as a watchmaker's.

Today was Saturday, summer was in its "dog days," and Tyler was on his way to a birthday party in Lexington. The car rattled, and Tyler knew it was protesting having to drive so fast on the interstate, but he was already running late. He rolled down the window, the LeBaron's only air conditioning, but the 90 degree heat made the breeze rushing in more of a hard slap to the face than a cool caress. He wondered whether or not to make a mental note for Damian to get that fixed, but he ultimately decided Damian wouldn't give a damn.

The car was a loner, what Damian loaned folks who wouldn't have their car for a couple of days. Tyler had been working as a mechanic for Superior Auto Service for almost a year, toiling under hoods and underneath cars, changing oil and replacing parts, until the grease turned his fingernails a permanent black. He kept quiet, for the most part, the way he did when he first got to Pine Knot for his 10-year stretch, observing, keenly aware of his personal space

and of where everyone was, the only difference between the garage and the yard was that the animosity in the yard was more evident. Someone hated you in prison, expect a punch aimed at your head or a shiv in your guts.

Tyler had figured he had accumulated enough goodwill by not being a problem to ask Damian about borrowing the car. He even slouched submissively, trying his best to look shorter than his usual 6'4, as he entered Damian's office. "Mr. DePaolo, sir?" he croaked, knocking on the door frame.

Damian's head of dark, slicked-back hair rose from the paperwork on his desk. "Sup, Keating. You takin' off for the weekend?"

"Uh, yessir. I was just needing—I mean I need to ask you about something, a favor really."

Damian's face clouded over with suspicion. To Tyler's knowledge, Damian hadn't had another ex-con working for him. Tyler glimpsed the suspicion and hesitated, thinking of what Damian's gaze said he was thinking: what kind of favor is it, how much will it cost me, or is this favor going to lead to a visit from the State Police?

"What kind of favor?"

"I need the loaner, boss," Tyler let the reasons pour out before his boss's imagination could go wild. "I have to go somewhere. My daughter's having a party this weekend. It's her thirteenth birthday, and it's in Lexington."

Damian smiled, apparently relieved it wasn't anything serious or potentially illegal. "Sure. Nobody's needin' the car and you got yourself a family matter. Just bring her back Monday morning." He signaled to where the key rested on a hook by the door.

He was ready to slip out the door when Damian called, "You didn't tell me you had a daughter, Keating."

Tyler stopped, feeling like he'd been caught in a lie, despising the feeling; he really needed it for the party, so why was he feeling like he was busted?

He replied calmly, "I haven't seen her in over ten years. My wife—ex-wife, her mother, invited me."

Damian nodded, seemingly in understanding. "Good luck, then," he told Tyler before lowering his head and once again focusing on his paperwork.

"Thank you, sir." As Tyler shut the door, he wondered how much luck he would actually need and offered a mental prayer for that luck when the time was right.

Though Tyler labored over details in his painting, slicking the paintbrush down till its tip was like the sharpest pencil, the process was overall a cathartic one. Before painting, he would drink a bit,

smoke some weed to mellow him out, and when that didn't work, he would fight. Tall and also broad, he felt he could win most of them, except for the one that took his freedom. Realizing that fighting got him into an 8x10 cell, he took up painting.

He felt frustration, nearly tossing canvas and paints all over when a smear of magenta went where it wasn't supposed to, but he took deep breaths, asked God to grant him serenity, and got back to painting. He enjoyed painting landscapes, scenes that he could create and control; he enjoyed being able to create these scenic, peaceful places, sometimes more than real life, which doesn't always obey a paintbrush or any one's will.

He looked at the notepad where he scribbled Cheryl's address, looked at Cheryl's new last name: Salisbury, like the steak. The marriage, the new last name, signaled to Tyler that the Cheryl he knew, the one who shook her hips in luscious figure eights and drank Coronas and did shots until she was ready to retire for the bedroom for a round of back clawing sex was gone forever. He imagined her baking pies, for some reason. Possibly getting fat because of it.

But he saw himself in the rearview mirror, saw the lines around his face and the flecks of gray around his temples (ever since he saw them in the bathroom mirror, he couldn't "not" see them). He glanced down at his large hands, flexing them, testing them, and then at the sleeve tattoos which covered his forearms. A tightening of his fist sent muscles bunching and veins popping beneath the flames tattooed there. He remembered the power within them.

“You fuckin’ him, Cheryl? You fuckin’ that needledicked motherfucker?”

It was one of their usual fights, where he might put his fist through a wall and she might toss one of her monstrous lamps at him with all her might. Typical Friday night back then.

“For chrissakes, Tyler! We were just talking!”

She was backed up against the wall, wearing a tank top and shorts, her sleepwear. At that moment, with beads of sweat descending the valley of her breasts and her eyes bright with anger and fear, Tyler remembered being torn between backhanding her and picking her up, carting her to the bedroom and having her. His time in prison didn't diminish his belief in the sexual explosiveness of makeup sex and that image of her stoked a flush to his older face.

“You talked a long time!” He had leaned in to remind her that he towered over her, an old conversation trick he did with most people. “And I saw where his hand went! And you weren't exactly stopping him either!”

Cheryl was a flirt, even more so when Tyler was watching. Tyler was quick to respond to her flirting by directing his anger toward the unfortunate lightning rod of her flirtatious energy. He'd broken the guy's nose, felt it squash like an overripe fruit under his fist, before grabbing a handful of the man's oversized jersey and tossing him through their duplex's door. He'd thrown him all the way to the sidewalk without even trying. He was on a high from that and from the way Cheryl looked that night.

“Maybe I thought he'd be a better lover than you, you big, dumb asshole!”

His libido winning, as it always did with Cheryl, Tyler had snatched up her wrists in one hand and practically pulled her onto the bed. He remembered the biting kisses he placed on her neck, her mouth. The scent of her perfume and the heat radiating from her had him wanting to kiss every inch of her. It didn't take long for him to strip her and do just that. His manhood that night was so erect, it hurt.

In the present, an older Tyler took a deep breath through his nose and let it out through his mouth. That memory—just remembering his ex-wife—had made the lack of female companionship all the more painful.

Tyler was so deep in thought that he went by the address once and had to backtrack. The house was smaller than he expected. Tyler expected a man who owned his own business to have a bigger house. There was barely a front lawn. Not where he pictured his daughter playing, dark hair like her mother's shining like the silk ribbons used to tie it.

Better than what I have, he thought. A shithole apartment in a shittier neighborhood. From the shouts and sirens in the night around his place, he wondered if the suits that paroled him thought the neighborhood would scare him straight or be enough like prison to keep him from getting homesick.

Tyler touched the painting in the back seat, feeling the edges of the frame. The nerves came quick like a punch in the stomach, forcing him to exhale the stress out in one long sigh. He was seeing his ex and his daughter after ten years away. They only remember the man he was,

and that man, in Tyler's opinion, wasn't worth shit. He closed his eyes and began muttering a prayer, willing his voice to be calm as he touched his sternum, home of his most recent tattoo: a large Celtic-inspired cross that stretched across his chest.

"Dear Lord," he whispered in the sweltering confines of the front seat. "I have made my share of mistakes and have paid for them. But I know that I've made even more mistakes that I ain't done paying for, at least as far as other folks are concerned. I just ask that you give me the strength to be there for my family." The "my family" made him stop since the woman he married and the daughter he fathered lived in another house that he could never hope to have. "Let me be the kind of man I believe I can be." He looked in the rearview at the man he now was, looking to see if it was enough. He finally said "Amen."

As he painted the picture that he'd carry under his arm on this balmy Saturday afternoon, Tyler wondered if he should paint the man, a man staring at the beauty before him, with shoulders held high and proud or stooping as though waiting for acknowledgement. This was one of the things that he'd labor over for days, the decision creeping into his day to day thoughts and activities. He'd even sketched it on napkins brought by other guys from when they got lunch.

Tyler walked to the door with the painting held under one arm. The other hand fussed with the neck of his Polo shirt. He knocked, waited. From inside the house came the crap today's radio was calling rock n' roll. He heard the sound of teen voices singing along, some of them giggling. Tyler half hoped that the music would be loud enough to drown out his

knocking. He tried once again, but half-heartedly. They may all be eating now. Probably disturbing them, he thought. I can probably get some Lee's Famous Recipe—

The door swung open. The woman at the door, dressed in shorts and a black t-shirt, looked vaguely like Cheryl, little more weight on the hips, lots on the tits. Maybe she was an aunt from out of town. He could feel the woman's eyes on him, moving their gaze from the ill-fitting "funeral" shoes to the gray at his temples.

"Hello Tyler," she said. Damn, he thought. She got old. Then he remembered how many years it really was. "Didn't think you'd make it." Was she disappointed? Or speaking like the prospects of him ditching was a sure bet?

Tyler smiled weakly. He wiped his forehead, already damp with sweat. "Got a little lost."

She smiled too, and he felt comfortable enough to attempt a return smile. Cheryl held up her hands as though he was falling forward. "Come in. It's hot as hell out there."

"Not too bad." He came inside, and a blast of air conditioning brought the gooseflesh out on his arm.

Peeking out the window, she asked, "You park on the curb?"

"Only place I could find. Driveway's full."

"She wanted a big party. I think she invited half the people in her classes. Feels more like I'm planning a wedding." She noticed the painting under Tyler's arm. "That your gift?"

He nodded, proud. "Painted it myself."

She shook her head, smiled as though he'd said something humorous. "Still can't imagine you painting anything."

"Keeps me busy. Idle hands are the devil's playground, right? And I figured it's about time I get good at creating instead of" —he wanted to say "destroying," but the stab of guilt, of lost opportunities, stopped him. "People said I have a talent for it."

Cheryl smiled at him, apparently approving of the new Tyler. The new Tyler soon stood a little straighter.

"Glad you found something you're good at, Tyler. Everyone's in the kitchen. Come on."

The kitchen was full of women dashing around like they were serving food to one-hundred. A plate of deviled eggs, held by a slim blonde, sailed past his head as another woman was pulling drawers open and slamming them shut.

"Where'd you put the candles, Cheryl?" she asked, her brow furrowed like she was completing major surgery.

"Top drawer, Lola. Behind the spices." Cheryl wrapped her arm around Tyler's, a gesture used mostly at proms, but the gesture was merely to help Tyler navigate his way to the

melee of women darting to and fro with the frenetic energy of bees making honey. But once out in the backyard, she let him go, the release so fluid, it was like Cheryl had simply vanished. "Put with the pile, Tyler," she called as she darted to the grill. "She'll open her gifts after she blows out her candles."

While Tyler was gingerly laying his painting next to the presents, Cheryl practically ran to give a quick hug to the man behind the grill before speeding somewhere else. He was shorter than Tyler, balding on top but with beefy arms that looked ready to tear the sleeves of his shirt. Cheryl kissed the man on the cheek and the man, wearing a "Kiss the Cook" apron, looked at Tyler like he was a dog that could crap on the manicured lawn at any moment. However, the man forced a smile on his face and waved him over with the spatula. Tyler obliged because 1) he was a guest and 2) he felt the need to show this man, Cheryl's new husband, that he was in no way intimidated by him. Could kick his ass, if need be, he thought. That helped Tyler return the smile.

"Name's Wade." Wade held out his hand to Tyler. Tyler pumped it once, twice, while saying his own name. He was surprised to find quite a grip in Wade's hand. "Grab you some grub and start eating. Take all you want but eat all you take." He noticed Wade stealing a glance at both his own and Tyler's individual paunches, mentally comparing them. "That never is a problem for big eaters like us, is there? Sometimes it feels like all that's left that's fun is eating."

Tyler's right fist clenched then unclenched. He thought he could hear the tendons in the hand pop with the strain. The old Tyler would have had Wade eating his teeth as an appetizer and Tyler's fist as the main course. He thought back to the night that cost him years of freedom. There was blood on his knuckles and a man at his feet. Tyler didn't even remember his name; it was something with a J, like Jon or James. The man, the usurper, had probably gurgled a reason for being in his lady's home—an excuse, Tyler thought, to save his ass—but he couldn't be heard over the blood in his throat or the mess Tyler had made of his mouth. Tyler had kicked the man in the stomach when he saw one of J person's teeth, shining pearly white among the red stain on his knuckles.

Cheryl screamed as Tyler punched him once, twice, three times. His first shot, a straight punch that came when J person held open the door, had rendered the man all but unconscious. He had held the man up and punched him until his face stopped being a face and became a tenderized mess of meat. Cheryl's scream was the counterpoint to the thudding in Tyler's own temples.

He was in my house, the thought rode the roaring blood in his brain all the way to his fists. He was in my bed. He was with my family.

Tyler had let the man drop, accusations ready to scream from his lips, how he was a good father (never hit his kid), how he was a provider (dealt a little hash and shrooms while fixing the occasional racing engine), how he never would have cheated (and he never did,

despite temptation from all fronts). Then he heard her screaming. Not Cheryl, who was weeping to the 911 operator, but Maddy.

In her mouth was her blanket, scrunched up in her tiny fists so tightly she looked to be stuffing it into her mouth. Her eyes were big and wide and streaming with tears that reddened her whole face. He wanted to reach out to his daughter, hug her to stop the crying that scraped on his nerves and tore at his heart.

I never hit you, he thought later in county lockup. I'd never hit you.

"You like brauts?" Wade said, louder. Tyler realized he zoned out, like he was stoned, and hated himself for showing weakness, but he grabbed a bun from the bag like it was a rock he was ready to hurl at someone, and told Wade, "Much obliged." Wade gingerly placed the braut in his bun. "You can sit in the shade, Tyler. Heat like this isn't kind to a fella who has to work in it." As Tyler walked away, Wade added, "Maddy'll be out to see you soon." Wade's face had lost its smile and he looked more like he just delivered some terrible news.

Tyler piled his plate with food: baked beans with thick pieces of bacon swimming among them, potato salad the same bright yellow of construction equipment, even some seven layer salad that seemed to be more mayonnaise than salad. The scene was very much like prison. Tyler took his meal with eyes watching him. He didn't so much see their gazes as much as feel them boring into his back as he sat in a lone deck chair in the shade. Plate in his lap, he

hunkered his tall frame over his meal as though protecting it. Tyler sat and tried to look for people looking at him, so he could flash one menacing glance to send their eyes elsewhere.

Tyler had finished wolfing his meal and was attempting to lift his overstuffed frame out of the chair and back to the grill when he saw her coming out of the house. Cheryl had sent some pictures (school photos, cheerleading pictures, them at Kings Island after mother and daughter braving Vortex together), but seeing her here, seeing the young girl with his chin and her mother's eyes, the girl he last saw with someone's blood on his own hands, sent a stab of guilt through his being. He stood up to greet her, to say I'm sorry. The words were on his lips when her eyes met his.

Tyler waved feebly, the hand more drifting from one position to another. Her eyes showed fear, and Tyler knew enough about intimidation to recognize fear. She chewed on her lower lip and smoothed down her dark hair over her face, hiding behind its veil before turning and heading into the house.

"Maddy?" Tyler barked. It was only after everyone looked at him that he realized just how loud he was. Their stern glares told him that his voice was entirely too loud and forceful and, in their minds, confirmed that he was just an angry convict who didn't belong on the outside. He forced his way through the network of stares, past the whispered gossip that seemed to worm its way into his ear ("He spent time in jail," "Beat up somebody pretty bad," and so on) and ran to his daughter.

Cheryl was there, her hands up like someone who knew that holding up hands was futile and wouldn't stop them from being ran over. But Tyler stopped, simply because he wanted to show all these people that he wasn't an animal, that he could be reasoned with. It suddenly seemed so important to prove it.

After Tyler stopped, Cheryl took a deep breath and told him, "I'll handle it, Ty."

Tyler had meticulously added the red and orange lines on the blue water's surface, streaks of vibrant color disrupting the calm. Tyler saw a lot of red in his life, a lot of vibrant colors that came from his interactions with people, but he had savored the blue of the water, wished there was more of its calm in his life. It was important he shared this calm, this inner peace, with his daughter.

Tyler waited outside. The air was hot, so hot that his lungs burned, and his skin was already stinging with the promise of a nasty sunburn, but Tyler waited. Cheryl was talking to Maddy in her room, where the girl had locked herself away, to see how she was feeling. He didn't know how long he'd be waiting for any news. He was starting to doubt that she'd come out of her room while she was here.

He tried speaking aloud the serenity prayer, but when it came time to ask God for courage to change the things I can, he realized he didn't need courage so much as a time machine to simply erase his presence at this party. The knowledge that he'd ruined his little girl's birthday party, simply by his presence, drove him outside where the midday heat was more forgiving than the assembled guests' accusatory glances.

"I shouldn't have come here," he whispered. He should be on his way home. The urge to paint, to streak colors violently all over the canvas, and then tear said canvas to pieces, was strong.

The screen door opening turned his attention to Cheryl walking toward him. The look on her face, the downcast eyes, almost had him in the car sans goodbye. But he still stayed because he wanted to see if Maddy was okay. Plus, he realized that Cheryl was older, but she was still beautiful.

"I'm sorry, Tyler. I really am. She seemed to like the idea of seeing you."

His tongue was dry and felt heavy in his mouth. He had to roll it around his mouth just to get the words out. "The food was good, at least."

"Wade will be happy to hear that."

Then came an awkward silence that dragged painfully on. Before he went to jail, he never considered that this emotional distance could exist. Feeling its existence made Tyler mourn for that past when Cheryl was his wife and Maddy was his daughter.

"She looks like you, babe." He mustered a smile. "Thank God she didn't get my ugly mug."

Cheryl shook her head. "It wasn't that ugly." Tyler saw Cheryl look into his eyes and there was the "spark," a dying ember of her own memories. "Under the right circumstances."

"I shouldn't have come," he said.

"I shouldn't have invited you." The sting to her words came with hypodermic quickness and intensity, but soon faded when he realized that she was right. She didn't look at him as she said, "I shouldn't have said that. It's my fault I jumped the gun. She said it was fine, but I should have known better."

"Why did you invite me?" It came out a growl and he regretted that, but that flash of anger that spurred those words quickly died again, his heart just not into hating today.

"She loves the work you sent her. It's in her room, even. I catch her just looking at it sometimes, like she's trying to figure out what's going on in the painting."

"Too bad I'll never get to explain it to her." He turned to get into his car when Cheryl grabbed his arm.

"That's not to say it won't ever happen, Tyler. She's just not ready yet. She'll come around."

Tyler shook his head. "She's not my daughter, sweetheart. Your man Wade had that job." Her hand moved down his arm and was soon holding his hand.

Cheryl laughed. "Sometimes, I think she's too much like you. She's got your temper, but she's apparently got some of your talent. You should see some of her work."

"She paints?"

"Watercolors. She also does pencil drawing, ink. It's hard to keep her focused on one thing."

"She shouldn't have to, if she's talented." Tyler hadn't realized that they were still holding hands; he hadn't realized that his hand now enveloped hers, cradling it as though it were a small bird. "I'm a better man than I was, but I don't know if I'm still good enough."

"Show her the man that asked for forgiveness. Show her the one who painted all those paintings from the heart. She'll think you're good enough." As he gave her hand a reassuring squeeze, Tyler felt the diamond of her wedding ring dig into his palm. Its touch sobered him.

"When will she be ready to talk to me?"

"Soon. You can call, maybe after a week. Maybe you two need to talk more. Just talk. Good things take time, Ty. Remember that."

"And faith," he said softly. He opened the door and slid behind the wheel. "Tell her to enjoy her birthday." Tyler started the car and waved to Cheryl. She looked a little sad as she returned his wave, like she was saying good bye to a part of her life. Again.

Tyler Keating drove back to Louisville with no air conditioning, his mind wandering to the frozen chicken he'd coax into a meal and what he could watch tonight on television. Touching the cross tattooed on his chest, he prayed that he would have the courage to

change . . . whatever he needed to change, so that he could be, in his mind and in other's eyes, good enough.

The painting showed two figures in the foreground, very little detail to them and nothing more than silhouettes. They were looking out across the hills toward the horizon where a brightly burning sunset, one that nearly exhausted Tyler's red and orange paints, ignited the sky. Though they were as dark as shadows, their silhouettes revealed a great deal about them: one of the figures was tall and broad-shouldered and the other was shorter, its shoulders were angular while its legs were swallowed by what could only be a skirt. One can even see the downward brushstrokes on the shorter figure's head and assume it was hair. The disproportionate size of the figures and the clues about their respective genders could have viewers assume they were looking at father and daughter. The "father" was holding the "daughter's" hand. Father's other hand pointed to the sun, as though introducing it.

Madeline "Maddy" Keating looked at the picture and wondered what it was trying to tell her and whether she would ever truly find out.

ROGER L. GUFFEY

The Better Angels of Our Nature

Clink. Clink. Avery Pittman slid the last two shells into the empty chambers of his Smith and Wesson 38 and gave the cylinder a quick turn. He pushed the pistol across the small table where he ate his meals and walked over to the bug-fouled window. He raised it on its creaky pulleys and leaned over the paint-peeling casement to view the dingy Chicago streets four floors below. The air was humid, smelling of an approaching thunderstorm, but it pulsed with the drone and sharp cries of the pimps, prostitutes, and drug addicts wandering the streets in front of the dirty flophouse. He pulled a rickety chair over to the window, sat down and began to practice aiming at their blurry, anonymous shadows.

“Bang, Bang, Bang, you’re all dead!” he said menacingly. Smiling a deviant grin, he repeated the ritual over and over like a kid shooting ducks in an arcade. Tiring of his imaginary target practice, he scooted a table and lamp over to the window, laid the pistol and his wallet on the table as he began to whisper the words to Steely Dan’s “Deacon Blues.”

He watched the sea of losers below, wondering if they knew they had an anthem. When the moonlight supplemented that of the yellowish street lights, he often sat watching the johns propositioning the hookers. Desperate women and men hustled their flesh for a living, and when a price and method were agreed upon, the parties would often come into this sleazy hotel Avery had called home for his first three months out of prison. If they went to a room adjacent

to his, he would often masturbate and groan in response to the fornications he could hear being transacted through the thin walls of the hotel. He dropped his head, chewed his lip in deep thought about the times he had resorted to whoring his own body to make enough money to survive. He shuddered as he relived those horrible moments of shame, degradation and desperation so far removed from his former life as a successful bank manager.

“Thank God, that Dad can’t see me now,” he muttered. “How the mighty have fallen, that is what he would probably say and as usual he would be right. And Mom would. . . I guess Mom would try to. . .” His voice trailed off as the uncertainty of her response.

Still whistling the tune running through his head, he set a large cardboard egg carton on the bed, began to fold his clothes, and laid them in the box in neatly arranged layers. After the clothes were packed, he laid the picture of his family, the eight-by-ten photo of his former fiancée, and the few remaining articles into the box. He wrapped two strips of duct tape across the lid and the bottom and wrote his parents’ address on the box. He returned to the table, and sorted through the papers and cards in his wallet, counted the four hundred dollars quickly, and crammed the wallet into his back pocket.

“Well, let’s get this show on the road,” he said, as he looked over his room once again. He put on a rain-jacket, picked up the box, left the room, and locked the door to the hallway that reeked of urine and sweat. A bare bulb shone dimly in the hallway, but it was enough for him to find his way down the stairs and into the noisy Chicago night where a light drizzle had begun to fall.

The box was cumbersome, but he managed to carry and drag it to the convenient store on the corner of the block. He shopped there for his meager needs, and knew the manager, Harun, well. He wrestled the door open and forced the box into the dingy store.

“Hey, Harun, I have a favor to ask. Can you help me out?”

Harun replied, “Only because you are my best customer. What do you need?”

“I’m moving, but I need to send this box to my folks. I won’t have time to send it tomorrow, because I’m working a double shift. It’s just personal stuff that I need them to store until I get a better place. I need you to drop it off at UPS tomorrow. Here.”

He reached into his wallet and handed Harun a fifty dollar bill. “That should be more than enough to send it. Just keep the change. Again.”

Harun recoiled, “Now why should I help you if you are taking your business elsewhere?”

“Oh, don’t be so melodramatic. I’ll still come by every few days to check on my best friend, but I can’t take this dump anymore. So what do you say? Deal?”

“I guess I can do that. Hey, wait a minute, you don’t have a return address on it. I don’t think UPS will take it without one. Here write your address on it.”

He handed Avery a Sharpie pen. “You know, I think you’re right,” Avery said as he scribbled his address in the upper left corner. Hey, man, I really appreciate your help. I got to be somewhere. Let me see. . . here, add this candy bar and chewing gum to my bill. Thanks again, man. See ya later.”

Harun said, "Hey, hold on there a minute. Take it and put it in the back of my car. I think it'll fit." He threw him the keys.

"Okay," Avery replied as he pushed the box toward the door, picked up one end, and duck-walked it across the damp sidewalk toward Harun's SUV. He opened the back door, wrestled the box into the back, locked the door, and returned the keys.

"Thanks again. You're a real life saver. See ya around."

The rain started to pepper down more heavily. Avery pulled his coat closer and made his way closer to the buildings that afforded him a little shelter from the rain. He recognized familiar faces of hookers on their home corners along the way. They braved the elements to make enough money to support their drug habits or pay the rent they could not afford from their day jobs. Occasionally, one would nod or say "Hi" or "Evening", but most recognized him only as the competition for their squalid business.

As he turned the corner, a scruffy black teenager stepped in front of him. "Hey, Mister, you feeling lonely tonight?"

Avery felt his blood rush to his head as he exploded back, "No, goddamn you!" He snatched the kid up by the lapels and threw him against the wall.

"Hey, man, I don't do that rough stuff. Just the best blow job you ever had."

"Why, you little punk. What the hell are you doing out here?"

"Trying to make a quick buck like everybody else."

Avery relaxed his grip on the boy's jacket and pushed his face closer to the boy's face."

“Hey, kid, that wasn’t what I meant. I want to know what you’re doing here at all. Don’t you realize how dangerous and degrading this is? I know. I used to work here, too.”

“Hey, look around, you see any other way for a brother my age to earn a living? I just want to earn enough to buy an iPod. I swear.”

Avery grabbed the kid again. “So, let me get this straight. You’re going to whore yourself and lose all respect for a fricking iPod? How stupid can you get? Here. Wait a minute.”

He pulled his wallet out, fished two hundred dollars out, and waved it in front of the kid’s face.

“If I give you this money, will you take it and never come back here or anywhere else like it? You gotta give this life up, period.”

“Damn straight, but I don’t want to be beholding to anybody. How about a quick handjob?”

Avery slapped the kid across the face and screamed, “You’re not listening! I want you to quit this life altogether. Now, not later, now!”

The kid rubbed his hand across his cheek, “All right, all right, you don’t have to get violent. But if I take your money, how you going to know that I kept my word? I may never see you again.”

“Because you’re going to swear to me on your honor as a man that you’ll keep your part of the bargain. If you lie about it, there is not much I can do, but I’ll rest easy knowing I had

tried to help you. I'll have no trouble standing in judgment, but you will. Son, I don't even know you, but you had better learn this now. You can't afford to throw your life away like this. You can't. Look, here's the money. Swear you'll go home and never do this again. Swear."

The kid took the money suspiciously, half expecting another slap but Avery simply folded the money into his hands. "I swear! Man, you're one crazy son of a bitch."

"Don't worry about me. Now get out of here. Go."

He watched the kid turn and disappear into the night.

"Stupid little bastard."

He continued along the store fronts for three blocks until he saw the all-night liquor store's neon sign flashing "Open". He felt the gun bulging in his waistband. He took a deep breath and started toward the store.

II

From as long as he could remember, Avery Pittman could recall his father's constant admonition to respect himself and his name, and to be a man. He distinctly recalled falling out of a small tree when he was three, lying on the ground crying in pain, only to have his father, Raymond, hoist him up by the arm, and dust him off as he said, "You ain't hurt none. Now quit crying like a baby. A man don't cry just because he fell down. Now stop it! You're a big boy now, so act like it."

He would be taught that lesson again and again during his youth. The only son in his family of three kids, he came to understand the weight of obligation resting on his shoulders. Neither a skinned knee nor a knot on his head was reason enough to show pain, and his stoic father would tolerate only a few minutes of whimpering from a broken forearm.

The family lived on twenty acres of land that supported a small tobacco crop, two fields of tomatoes and peppers, a cow, and a small herd of Yorkshire hogs. Scraping a living from the rocky dirt was not easy, and the family struggled to make ends meet between crops and litters of pigs. Raymond scoffed at the idea of applying for welfare, food stamps, or any other kind of assistance. He constantly reminded his wife, Alene, and his kids, "We got no use for charity. Ain't no Pittman ever took it, and we ain't going to be the first. Ain't going to dishonor our family name now or ever."

Raymond and Alene were barely literate, but they worked hard to make sure all their children got a good education. Avery's sisters, Peggy and Annie, earned associates degrees at the local community college, but Avery's academic record qualified him to attend the University of Kentucky. Seeing how gifted his son was at academics, Raymond doubled the size of the hog herd to help fund his son's education. Fortunately, Avery earned enough scholarship money concentrate on his studies without having to work a part-time job.

When he graduated college, Raymond's chest swelled with pride as he told him, "Son, you're the first Pittman to earn a four year degree. Now you can write your own ticket to a good future."

Avery took a job with Ohio Casualty and rose quickly through the ranks of its accounting department. Soon he was engaged to a coworker, Cheryl Evans. They planned an elaborate wedding for the following summer.

But as swift as his meteoric rise was, his fall was even more sudden. One night after an evening of carousing with some of his friends, he had a wreck, killing a young girl in the other car. He was charged with driving under the influence and vehicular homicide, convicted and sentenced to five years in prison. So Avery Pittman, the pride of his father's dreams, became prisoner 576432.

His incarceration was a nightmare. Cheryl tried to maintain their relationship, but ultimately broke off their engagement. A month into his term, he was attacked and brutally gang-raped by other prisoners. He spent the duration of his term constantly fending off similar attacks with only intermittent success.

After his release, he found out how hard it was for an ex-con to find a job. In desperation, he began to work as a male prostitute. Wishing to spare his family the shame of his life, he had little contact with his family. To his horror, the further he withdrew from his family, the more deeply he fell into the street life, until the embrace of an anonymous john offered him the only comfort he could find. But the sense of self-loathing of having lost not only his family name, but his identity as a man, plagued him with sleepless nights and days filled with despair. His life had lost all meaning, and he struggled to find a way to regain it.

III

The rain had slowed to a constant drizzle when he entered the liquor store. He meandered along the aisles, and examined bottles and carafes, while two late night customers finished their shopping. He rechecked the position of the gun under his jacket and started to move toward the counter. He pretended to survey the array of cigarette brands until the clerk asked, "May I help you?"

Feeling his heart pounding so violently that he was sure that the man could see his chest vibrate, he replied, "Yes, a box of Marlboro lights."

The clerk got the box from the display and turned around to face him. Avery stuck his gun in his face and said in a quavering voice, "All right, mister, I don't want to hurt you, but give me your money."

Obviously shaken, the man replied in a meek voice, "There ain't much here, but just don't shoot. You can have it."

Avery's glance shifted to the small safe behind the counter, and he didn't see the man press the silent alarm button under the counter.

"What about the safe? What's in there?"

"I don't know the combination."

He aimed the gun at the man. "You're a liar. I've seen you open it before when I was in here. Now open the safe or lose your face. Your choice."

The clerk's face blanched, but he nodded in agreement. He slowly made his way over to the safe and started to turn the dial.

"Hurry up. I ain't got all day."

"It's hard to think with that gun pointed at me. Let me see. Four right, five left, six left, two right." The door opened, revealing several stacks of bills.

Avery pulled a large paper bag from under the counter. "Put it all in this sack. Hurry up, damn you!"

The man did as he was told, neatly stacking the bands of bills in the sack.

"I said hurry up."

"If I just throw them in there, they won't all fit."

"Dammit, give me what you got!"

The man handed him the sack. "Please don't hurt me."

"I ain't going to hurt you. Lay down on the floor there. If you get up before I get out of here, I'll blow your head off."

The clerk lay down, and Avery watched him as he backed away. He pushed the door open with his body, and turned to run, but a loud voiced yelled, "Drop your gun, and put your hands on your head!"

Avery saw cruiser with four policemen leaning on them as they aimed their guns at him. He fired blindly in their direction and ran away from the store. One officer yelled, "Stop or I'll shoot!"

Avery continued to fire rapidly and tried to escape. The officers returned fire, and he felt sharp hot pains tear through his back. His legs collapsed, and he crumpled onto the wet blacktop where he laid breathing in labored gasps and feeling his warm blood oozing from his body. He fired the gun once more before his eyes closed and everything went black.

Two of the policemen went into the store, while two others approached him. One officer gave him a soft kick, but getting no response, he knelt and turned Avery's body over.

"He's dead as a door nail. Dammit, I guess we got a lot of paper work to do tonight."

The other police officer said, "I'll go call it in and get the forensics unit here. See if he has any ID."

The officer slipped his hand under the bloody jacket and pulled out Avery's wallet. He shuffled through the contents, while the other officer wrestled Avery's gun from his hand.

"So, what do you got?"

"Old license says he's Avery Pittman. About a hundred fifty dollars. Hey, look at this. Organ donor card, a newspaper clipping seeking a liver donor. Some kid on the east side. Pretty damned weird that a perp thinks he could be an organ donor. Never seen that before."

The other officer motioned with his head to the spent shells lying in his outstretched hands. "You think that's weird, look at this! Blanks! Every damned one of them was blanks!"

SUSAN SLOCUM

The Dream

The snow came down in a blinding fury making outside a virtual white out. With my nose pressed up against the front door window, I could hardly see the neighbor's house. The blowing wind bounced the thick, heavy branches of the old elm trees like young saplings. According to the weatherman, a nor'easter blizzard had reached our area. The forecast predicted three to five feet with winds gusting to fifty miles per hour. My brother danced around the living room singing, "No school tomorrow. No school tomorrow." How could he be so happy? Did he not see the impending danger ahead? I had my eye on the swaying light pole across the street. The wind shook the pole so viciously that at any moment the pole could snap and we would be plunged into darkness. My mother, sensing my concern, tried to reassure me. "Don't worry. If we lose electricity, we will still have heat because the furnace is powered by gas, not electricity. You might not be able to watch Captain Kangaroo tomorrow, but at least you will be warm." I kept quiet, for fear my brother would make fun of me, but deep down, the blizzard had frightened me.

Another episode of "Lost in Space" came to an end which signaled my bedtime. "Make sure you brush your teeth," those words rang in my head as I reluctantly started up the stairs. Before I headed to the bathroom, I snuck into my brother's room to look out at the storm. The buildup of frost on the windows obstructed the view. Normally, I would appreciate Jack Frost's

artistic touch, but tonight, the artist would be snubbed. The storm raged on and the wind shook the house. I brushed my teeth and ran to my room. My mother tucked me in bed singing, "Night night. Sleep tight. Don't let the bed bugs bite." Without being reminded, she turned on the closet light because as everyone knows, monsters hate light. My stuffed animals, lined up on each side of my bed, had their orders to protect. Happy the clown guarded the right side and Floppy the Dalmatian guarded my left. No self-respecting monster would attack with this heroic bunch at my side. But monsters did not dominate my thoughts tonight. The wind's relentless howl made me imagine the glass panes shattering and I would be whisked outside, never to be found. I had better take cover and get under the blankets as I snuggled up to Floppy.

To fall asleep quickly, I started to count back from a hundred. I stopped at ninety two because my bed began to shake. My brother is under my bed again, I angrily thought. I started to scream for my mother, but before I could utter a word, my bed rose from the floor. This must be a dream. This cannot be happening, I thought. Beds do not float. As I looked around, I heard a playful voice out of nowhere ask, "Let's go outside and fly through the snow. Don't worry, I promise we will have a fun time outside!" Being hesitant, I said, "But will I be warm?" I only heard laughter, as my bed turned towards the hall. With the grace of an acrobat, my bed maneuvered the corners of the hallway with ease. Down the stairs through the living room, I waved to my mom as we glided by. Her cigarette lit, she watched "I Love Lucy" and laughed at Lucy stomping grapes. The swirl of the smoke trailed up from her cigarette. I reached out

to touch the smoke, but my hand touched a glass bubble that surrounded my bed. I had not noticed the bubble before, but now knew I would be warm and protected as the night's adventure awaited.

We headed towards the kitchen and down the back stairs. Could this really be happening, as I heard the sound of the dead bolt spring from the rusty latch? The old wooden door creaked and opened with a groan. All at once I saw a whirl of whiteness from the warmth of my bed. As we emerged into the cold dark night, dancing snowflakes scurried around my well protected bed, welcoming us to play.

What a delight to see such a storm and to be free of such fear. My three cotton blankets and faded green quilt enveloped me in warmth. My blue flannel nightgown, soft and frayed around my neck, made me feel like a snow queen dressed up for a trip. My loyal subjects, Happy and Floppy faithfully sat upon my pink chenille bedspread. Their unconditional friendship comforted me as we sailed through the night.

My snowy chariot took us through the tree tops then catapulted us close to the ground. We did hand stands and summersaults while the bed kept flying. As we flew past Annie and Patty's house, I wondered if they would be jealous when I told them of my flight. Although I wanted to wake them, I thought best to let them sleep. When we turned the corner, I saw Mr. Dee coming home in his '67 Chevy. The heavy car rocked and swayed as it struggled to make the hill. The tired vehicle slowed down and slid into the snow drifted driveway. Mr. Dee climbed out of his car and did not look back as he trudged up the path to his house. The

crunching snow beneath his feet must have signaled relief as he reached his front porch and turned off the light.

The snow piled up, blanketing everything with white. I could no longer make out any solid objects, only soft billowy mounds. The ground resembled fluffy white clouds that had come down from the sky to rest.

All of a sudden, my bed turned upside down. My animals and I tumbled in a frenzy of flannel and cotton. Our peaceful moment now ended. We resembled a chaotic scene of a child in a Tilt a Whirl without any straps. The blizzard must be getting worse. No sooner had I thought to plot my destination home when instantly I felt my mother's arms as she gently picked me up off the floor.

"I heard the commotion, I thought the wind had swept you out the window," she said as she tucked me in bed. I wanted to tell her of my travels, but I knew I would get in trouble for being up past my bedtime. I decided to keep my adventures to myself. "That must have been some dream to toss you out of bed," she said as she smoothed my hair. "Well, do not worry my dear. I cannot imagine school will be open tomorrow. You and your friends will have a fun day making snow forts and building snowmen."

As she closed the door, I asked Floppy and Happy if our snow filled journey had really happened. Without actually speaking, I noticed the wink they shared as I snuggled down and waited for sleep.

My childhood dreams have melted away like the snow of that blustery evening. Snow queens and journeys have transformed fantasies into everyday living, sometimes life unforeseen. But just as a storm can be unexpected, the redundancies of the seasons create comfort to what life has unexpectedly, scattered our way. When the seasons change to winter, I cannot help but smile, when I hear the wind start to blow, and the windows begin to rattle.

NATE SMITH

Delacroix's Cigarettes

Nicholas looked at words carved onto the sixth rung of the ladder. They read: "Abandon hope all ye who enter." They had been carved there by the wizened Captain Montreeve with his old pocket knife and its faux-ivory handle. Nicholas smiled every time he read the words, but Montreeve had been dead months now. He owed it to shrapnel wounds. Nicholas yawned and stretched his arms and then reached into his pocket for a cigarette but found none.

"Damn. Where's Delacroix when you need him?" he mumbled. Delacroix was the Frenchman who came like clockwork every Tuesday and brought him the letters from his fiancé, Amelie, in Paris but more importantly brought him some of his homemade cigarettes.

Nicholas crouched down in the frozen mud of the trench and shivered inside his jacket just like the other soldiers stretched down the line. It was 2 a.m. The terrible cold slithered into his skin, and he could hear a harsh wind blowing above the trench and across No Man's Land. Delacroix's cigarettes and Amelie were the only warmth he was afforded in the trench and the only human things he could focus on. Twenty feet away lay the body of his friend, Lt. Wyatt, wrapped in a blanket. Nicholas had helped wrap him up and had used his own blanket which was now stained by the Lt.'s shrapnel wounds. Someone had already snatched Wyatt's blanket, which meant Nicholas would have to fish around for a new one for himself. With no blanket he needed those cigarettes more than ever. He had played poker with Wyatt just the night before.

Nicholas's ante had been a share in the cigarettes while Wyatt had offered to buy dinner in Paris, "just as soon as this bloody mess is done with," he'd said. Nicholas had won. He always won against Wyatt.

Nicholas tried not to think about anything except the cigarettes. He was standing on the ladder and peeking over the edge of the trench when dawn and Delacroix finally came, each a herald for the other.

"Nicholas, get your damn head down before the Germans decide to use it for target practice," came the familiar voice, booming from below.

Nicholas hopped off the ladder and rushed to Delacroix. They shook hands and Delacroix smiled, a large smile full of teeth beneath a bushy moustache. He handed Nicholas an envelope and left. That was the transaction, smiles and handshakes in exchange for cigarettes.

Nicholas pulled out the letter and put the envelope containing a dozen cigarettes in his pocket. He read her letter and laughed. She always could cheer him up. He looked back over at the bloody blanket and frowned. He walked over to the Lt. and knelt down. A couple of other men nearby looked at him as he pulled the blanket back. As he put Amelie's letter in his pocket he drew out the envelope of cigarettes. He carefully placed the cigarettes in Wyatt's coat pocket and then stood up and went back to crouch in the mud. He put his hand in his pocket and rubbed his fingers against the paper of Amelie's letter as the night wind burned his face.

"Stay warm, Lieutenant. You win this time," he said.



Left of the Enchanted Forest JEWELL BURTON



Hand-Man JEWELL BURTON



Untitled SHAWN GANNON



Untitled SHAWN GANNON



Shaker Chair ROGER L. GUFFEY



Spider TIFFANY HORTON



The Overcoming BRITNEY KERSHAW



Wonder BRITNEY KERSHAW

Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:

Don Boes teaches at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council. Poems by Don Boes appear in two recent anthologies: *What Comes Down To Us: 25 Contemporary Kentucky Poets* published by University of Kentucky Press and *Bigger Than They Appear: Very Short Poems* published by Accents Publishing.

Jewell Burton is an Art Major and Lexington native who enjoys Photography as her preferred medium.

Shawn Gannon is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College.

James Gardner is originally from Olive Hill, Kentucky. Earning a MA in English from Morehead State University, he enjoys teaching English, writing stories, and reading graphic and non-graphic novels. He has a wonderful wife and family who inspire him to be awesome every day.

James B. Goode is a Professor of English at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has published poetry, fiction, and essays since the 1960s. He is a creative writer, essayist, photographer, and Appalachian scholar, who has written about the Appalachian region since the 1960s. He has authored four books of poetry and two technical books on coal mining, produced and directed two documentary films, published short stories in two major anthologies, published over 500 poems in national and international magazines, and written over two hundred columns for the *New York Times*, the *Lexington Herald-Leader*, *Harlan Daily Enterprise*, *Coal County Extra*, and various other newspapers and magazines.

Roger L. Guffey is an adjunct faculty member at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He has taught math at the college for over 24 years. He also teaches full time at Lafayette High School. He enjoys writing fiction and is currently working on a collection of short stories. He also does a lot of photography and is in the process of setting up a web page.

Annie Harover is a freshman at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She enjoys writing short fiction and one day hopes to write a novel. She currently lives in Lexington, Kentucky.

Jaelyn Hawkins is originally from Lawrenceburg, Kentucky. She moved to Lexington five years ago to attend the University of Kentucky. Within four years, she graduated with degrees in English, Political Science, and Appalachian Studies. She now works as Bluegrass Community and Technical College's Study Skills Specialist and will be attending Naropa University in Boulder, Colorado in the fall to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing for poetry.

Tiffany Horton is a current freshman at Bluegrass Community and Technical College and lives in Stanton, Kentucky. She enjoys drawing as a hobby and her favorite medium is colored pencils. When not drawing, she loves to spend time with her son and her family

Jasmine Johnson grew up in Oceana, Michigan and is now a current student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She now lives in Lexington and is part of the Kentucky National Guard.

Melissa Jones is the Associate Vice-President of Business Services at Bluegrass Community and Technical College and an adjunct accounting instructor. This poem is dedicated to her grandparents, Luther and Gladys Hicks of Maytown, Kentucky.

Britney Kershaw is a 20 year old Bluegrass Community and Technical College art education student hoping to become an elementary art teacher. She is transferring to University of Kentucky within the next year to work in studio courses. She also is hoping to teach abroad after graduate school.

Elizabeth Kilcoyne is a senior at SCAPA Lafayette in Creative Writing and Governor's School for the Arts Alumni. She takes classes at Bluegrass Community & Technical College through the Opportunity Middle College program and hopes to attend university full time this upcoming fall. She has been featured before in the Teen Howl Poetry Series and the Laurel Literary magazine, among other publications. She hopes to release her second chapbook sometime this coming year.

LaTosha Pence is a student at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. She is originally from Missouri but has lived many places. Her interests include writing poetry, astronomy, art, and outer space.

James Poole was born and reared in New Orleans and for the most part lived in the area of the city called Holly grove. He graduated from Alcee Fortier HS, attended Prairie View AM University for about 2.5 years (1979-82) and joined the armed forces (army) in November of 1982 (ETS 1988). He earned a BA from Xavier University of Louisiana and a Master of Music degree from the University of New Orleans. He's always been creative with a much stronger focus in the performing arts as a trumpet player. But, he also sketches, sculpts and writes as well.

Susan Slocum has enjoyed exploring the writing process. Originally from Syracuse, New York, she now resides in Winchester, Kentucky with her husband Scott, and her beagle, Agnes.

Nate Smith is a recent graduate of the University of Kentucky with a double masters in German and Education and works as an Educational Advisor at Bluegrass Community and Technical College. He enjoys writing short stories and novels focusing on German Romanticism and historical fiction set in Europe from the Middle Ages up to World War II. He founded and oversees the Bluegrass Community and Technical College Writers Guild.

Tyler Wood (J. Tyler Wood) is a full-time student, who also works a lot at his job. Name a sport, and he's played it. He was a tri-athlete in high school, and continues to play indoor soccer and flag football during college with different friends and family. He has a deep passion for poetry, whether it's about love, comedy, or pure randomness, it is what he does!