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* Bluegrass Accolade
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\textit{BCTC “In Your Words” Poetry Contest}

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2010-2011 Arts in Focus Literary Arts Subcommittee

**Chair:** Maureen Cropper **Members:** Paul Blankenship, Don Boes, Charles Coulston, Rae Ann Gill, Melinda Lemaster, Dan Schuman, Tammy Ramsey, and Stacy Webster-Little
SHANE HARRIS

About Gypsies

The seductive sway of Romany skirts, as bare feet beat time to fireside violins -- the aroma of fresh bread in olive oil rising with that spring grape stiffness; the fermentation of the seasons as wagon wheels roll toward Naples and well-aged songs of Italian summers are sung by smoke-eyed women, each a blur of veils, black hair and hips dancing sex against the Tuscan night.

Steel-tipped men, with razors in pockets, patrol the Coliseum like mythic predators. Each is a vagabond god, sleek in hair and stride with stiletto eyes and blades in short-heel boots.

These gypsies only appear in American movies.

Romany don’t drive wagons and rarely dance. Most days they beg the Roman rich for crumbs. Rather than silks and cymbals they carry crying babies and grope among the garbage, or pick the pockets of fat Americans while mumbling dialects Da Vinci never notebooked. They’ve stowed the fragile mysteries of heritage, packed them on steamships bound for New York.

These are the fortunes I set out to foretell.

Then the phone rings and Jeremy’s voice sings songs about our nomadic youth -- drinking Ottenheim wine by campfires with smoke-eyed women all black hair and hips; encounters with vagabond men, bootleggers,
with beards broad as the Mediterranean. We share tales of broken wagon wheels, and apologize for not remembering the rituals for fixing such things. In the background the expected music of a new life’s cymbals: babies crying and the faint rattle of a newspaper.

This was to be a poem about gypsies, but metaphors are secretive and exotic as veiled women walking in the plaza.
ROBERT DAVIS

American Lullaby: The Great Sea

Firelight shadows. Midnight gears whirling, Ticking and tocking In clockwork perfection. Provocative thoughts On the lips of your lover.

Wait, my dear. Let the fire die a little. Let the darkness eat the world; I want to repose in your light alone.

Later we sleep.

Dreams of the sea, The Great Sea, Last bastion of a desperate soul. See the tide rising, Mounting, and growing, Playfully pushed By a large and silver moon. There is no relapse of worry here; The warmth sustains the spirit. Scattered shells glimmer; They’re covered in color, Brushed by the Maker, His godly design. Listen. You’ll hear their song. The sweeping and tinkling Caresses and calms.
I was walking by the sea,
The salty air embracing me.
I dreamed of sands in foreign lands,
And those I would explore.

I sat amid the frothy brew
Imagining a time with you.
In distant sunset sanction.
It’s that memory I implore.

The moon pulls hard to quench its thirst;
To fill itself until it bursts.
To lounge within a cool lagoon,
Enwrapped in gentle sway.

Playful waves and currents deep;
Through corral, sand, and rock they seep.
Imagine us among the tide,
Amid the blue ballet.

Sweet, isn’t it?
I knew you could dig it.
You wonder just as much as I
What’s beyond these mighty waters?
What yawning desire beckons us hither?
I ache for the spray
And the wind whipping west.
I long for rough hewn planks
Under hard, tanned feet,
And ropes of the rigging
In calloused, weathered hands.
Let’s build a ship of pitch and palm.
Let’s chart a course for unknown adventure.
Let’s waste no time;
My heart is growing restless.

I awake in land-lock.
The scent of the sea dissipates;
It flees from my nostrils
Like a frightened child.
My lover yet wanders
In aisles of unconsciousness.
The magic has died,
The dream has lied.
I’m bound by rock and soil.
I want to weep,
But still...
I feel the pulling in my mind.
I feel the sea
Still beckoning me.

I will heed its call.
DON BOES

Hurricane Season

Qualified computer models cut to the chase:
Debbie or Ernesto or Nadine or Oscar
will soon be trashing the beaches and condos
of Daytona and New Smyrna. Right now
I’m watching a few lazy dolphins close to shore
and the sky is a blue I have never seen
soaking into another blue I have never seen.
Even the sand is clean like on Gilligan’s Island
without all that dicey stuff that reminds me,
as if the topic ever really disappears,
what happens after my last free breakfast.

One morning you’re looking into real estate deals
and by happy hour you’re ensnared
in the cone of probability. Just like in a riot
strangers and loose objects turn dangerous.
It’s too late to disconnect the gas.
The bathtub is filled with clammy bikinis
instead of water for non-drinking purposes.
Power is not an option and may not be restored.
All you want is a measure of power
but what little you had is gone
and there’s less where that came from.
DON BOES

Out of Bed

What gets me out of bed
is the pleasure of eating cornflakes
with the spoon I discovered
in the casino parking lot.
It was spring and the asphalt
bloomed with yellow lines
and stenciled numerals.
Whatever is true must be exaggerated
to be believed. Too many people
spend weeks staring at the wrong data,
neglecting their diets,
their appearances suffering.
I would rather plummet from the apex
of the loftiest nomenclature
than create a new password
or decorate one more cubicle
in a personal style. On my way down
I will count my chickens
and their slippery eggs
and write my parents’ names
in my top-secret journal.
When I hit the loamy earth,
my first and last pillow in this life,
my eyes will be open.
I remember what it felt like, sitting beside the artist.
The music he would play as he stared out of the window
Holding onto the hope that what he had been feeling hadn’t been fabricated
I remember how it felt with the wind between my finger tips
And how when reality settled in, I knew that our minds had been astray

We were artists, hand in hand.

Dreaming, creating, and believing that what we had created was real.
We were mad scientists, unfolding all of our imagination into one epic hypothesis.
But what we had composed was not authentic.
The image we’d upheld was terribly insignificant in comparison to the genuine existence of what surrounded us.

We were artists, hand in hand.

Who had gone silently mad
Continuing to binge drink on every last bead of our own brand of utopia.
We were stumbling about, buttoning up our vests.
We were writing down our thoughts with perfect prepositions
And holding our hearts in which we wanted to race

We were artists, hand in hand.

Creating the most magnificent picture we intended on painting and we did.
With such perfectly structured color combinations, we made the world believe it.
What a strange attachment we had formulated
While he covered his mouth before he spoke
There was not one verb, metaphor, or simile out of place.

We were artists, hand in hand.

Spiraling down to the final conclusion
That our analysis was proving to be decidedly counter-factual.
And so we laid out all of our tools and chemicals, and exhaled conclusively.
It was time for the artists to call it quits
And so we released our grips.

But I couldn’t forget what it was like, sitting beside the artist.
8 a.m. Class

Early, so early.
Heads cast down, feet barely clearing the ground,
dawn’s light painfully entering half-slit lids.

They enter.
Chairs simultaneously scuffing the floor as if on cue.
Among the books carelessly cast down
is a carefully wrapped McSomething purchased from the dollar menu.
Amidst the yawns,
cheap plastic cups hold the milky-mud promise of caffeinated energy
straight from the counter of the local Speedway;
Here, there is no Starbucks.

Darkness remains, inside and out.
The vague clattering of computer keys searching for Facebook friends
and Blackboard grades,
that somehow must reflect illusion more than reality.
The only light in the room emanates from the computer’s screen,
a face that never seems drowsy.

In I walk.
Putting down my well-worn black satchel,
a long ago gift once testifying that, “I’d finally arrived!”
Now, the broken zippers and fraying strap seem to laugh at me mockingly.
I place down keys, my phone, and a folder of graded and ungraded papers
beside the banana I intend to have for lunch.
Finally, I look up and out, mustering a smile.

Class begins.
I walk over to the switch on the wall;
It’s time to turn on the lights.
JAMES B. GOODE

Sleeping With My Mother

You never really expect it.
They usually come to you
In the sterile hallway of the hospital
Or the black telephone rings
At a startlingly odd hour
Sometimes
They say
“Your Mother’s on the telephone . . .”
And then you just know it for sure.
“He fell dead
Sitting on the toolhouse steps
Slumped over
His back arched like one of the sacks of feed
I’ve seen him set across the top rail
Of the hog pen
Until he could get his pocket knife out
To cut the string.”
Then there’s the dial tone
The constant in our lives
To let us know
The conversation’s over
But you continue to talk inside
A dialogue with a shadow
That remembers the richness
Of his laugh
And now the shadow sees him
Silent,
Lying on his back in the grass,
His lips purple as the plums
We ate together once
When I was a child.

I wrapped my arms around her
And we got in their bed,
She on his side
And me on hers--
A surreal
Reversal
In a foggy night.
We didn’t let go
While we waited
For the others to return.
I imagined them
Birds
Flying on instinct
Toward home again.
I can’t imagine
What her shadow imagined.
“Ring my bell!”
She says.
“240 lb full-figured honest woman
looking for a secure, emotionally mature male
with a streak of pagan . . .
Sarcasm a must . . .”

Where can one find a sarcastic, secure, emotionally mature pagan?
I ask
What kind of woman is this?
A “Buzz Me” lady?
A “Call Me” girl?
A “Let’s hang out chick?”
A “Need someone to love lonely heart?”
I’m afraid I don’t qualify
For anything anymore
I quickly call
And cancel my Ad:
“52-Year-Old, 6’ 4”, 200 lb Grandfather of 5,
Reformed smoker and drinker
With Osteoarthritis and Autoimmune Hepatitis
Willing to ride the wind
With anyone who has similar interests.”
STACY GORDAN

Unfriend

It is not fair
What you brought to me
What you hold for me
That piece of me
That fit so neat
It is not fair
So, I need it back
I am feeling rather
Incomplete
JOSEPH HAYDON

You

When there is not a cloud in the sky,
    I think about you.
When the sun sets in an ocean so blue,
    I think about you
    My heart enjoys the race,
When you are in my presence.
When I think about you after,
My heart worships your remembrance.
With eyes of the most divine color,
    I can only wonder.
What my life so true,
    Would be like...
If I didn’t have the pleasure,
Of thinking about you.
VANEDRA MOORE

Wind

The wind whistles in my ear
as it races past my face.

I can feel its body bump against my skin
leaving a cold blanket behind.

Leaves dance in front of me as if
they were twirling ballerinas.

The pine tree giggles as the wind
wraps itself around it, and the pine tree
loses some of its decor.

I can see the flying fowls gliding in the air
as their wings mate
with the wind and fly forever.

The wind whispers in my ear
and tells me good bye.
The dog runs toward the shadow figure, moving like mercury freshly spilled out of a thermometer, but never breaking its permanent form, bound by natural law to fulfill its duty. The dog covers vast ground to reach the shadow figure, achieving speed and power common to others of his breed, but this dog has one thing others do not: spirit—the intangible element within those who laugh at danger and waft it away like a foul odor.

This dog has a soul and this gives him the means to do the impossible, to know deep inside that if he doesn’t reach this shadow figure all is lost. He calls upon the Spirit for the power to break the barriers other mere canines are unable to pass. This Spirit gives the animal the means to become god-like. It bestows an honor enabling him to be referred as something more than ‘it’ and ‘man’s best friend.’ The Spirit allows the dog to dance with titans and play croquet with the heads of Cerberus.

The dog is aware of this power. He allows it to flow through him, strengthening his muscles and tendons, increasing the work of the neurons and synapses to give him the extra juice he needs to destroy the shadow figure. The taste of the Spirit is sensational, something only the holder can comprehend, yet even words are beyond the user.
This emotion churns within its host, causing a myriad of buried potential to emerge. As with all packed closets, once it opens, everything falls out, causing a mess difficult to sort. The demons of the dog weigh heavy, caused by many Spirit-less years. Since the discovery of the Spirit, these demons reveal themselves, and it’s up to the host of the Spirit to decide where these demons find their new home.

The dog, now panting as he runs, pushing the limits of his sinewy legs, wants desperately to find this shadow figure. He begins seeing images of himself tearing at the figure’s ankles, if it has ankles, and ripping the shadow away, revealing the true evil behind the curtain. He hopes to rip skin off his gossamer shield, to show the world this is only a man, and that supernatural evil doesn’t exist. The dog focuses on his goal, not realizing his demons are now fueling his power, or he does realize but allows it, whatever helps gets him closer to his target.

The dog reaches deep within the Spirit, grabs a hold of something—something powerful and seductive—and pulls it from the depths to use in this last push to success. This surge of power gives the dog incredible speed and he pounces on the shadow figure, becoming a machine made to destroy anything in its path. This machine gets within range of the shadow figure and its mouth clamps on whatever it can find. If the shadow figure had body parts, it would now be missing its hip.
The dog jerks the confusing substance from the figure, slinging it back and forth like a rattler would to warn off threats, but the dog’s tactic is used to fight threats. The dog tears and rips at the shadow figure until all that is left is something resembling black spider webs, floating through the air trying to find a place to rest. The dog lets the dark material fall from his mouth. He stares at the black webs dancing through the air.

The dog watches the path of one web glide heavily toward the ground, falling like a feather would after being separated from its winged friend and now trying to find a new home. When a boy sees a feather he wonders where it came from. Immediately he sees it as a writing utensil and wishes he had a bottle of ink so he can scribble up some letter, pretending he is some colonial in the war writing his family. Whether or not the child knows, the feather becomes a means of communication, signaling longing and separation.

The feather, much like a soldier in a war, is separated from its family and other loved ones by some force, conscription or voluntarily, but the repercussions are the same. The soldier feels lost and isolated. His family is gone and he is miles away, fighting something that could be solved with palaver between two men. This dark feather-like object has been stripped from his family and now falls to isolation in front of the dog.

The dog lowers his head to the dark material and blows at it, giving life to it once again. It floats up, peaks in the air, and then arcs down once more to the ground. This time, the dark feather lies next to a corpse. The dog missed this before. This body looks familiar. The young
pallid face that once was home to a jovial rosy child is now lifeless. The dog has seen this body in a past life, as well as the two older bodies lying abreast to the child. This is his family; they were too close to be called masters.

The dog walks closer to the child, unable to prevent his keen smell to identify the rotting flesh. The boys eyes are open, the eyes ghostly and looking past the dog toward a hopeful afterlife.

_{The Spirit!}_

The dog feels the inner being once again—that power inside that gives him clairvoyance beyond any living creature. This power comes with a new gift: the gift of sight. The dog sees it now.

The dog can see the puncture wounds on the child’s neck. He scans the body and notices torn clothes and ripped skin. This is the work of something pure evil. _But how can the shadow figure do this? With what power? The Spirit knows._ The dog sees even more.

These wounds are bite marks, the mark of a canine, one with a power not seen by any being, used for some evil purpose, driven by demons long repressed—suddenly opened. The dog barks madly at the child. He barks at the gore he is witnessing, hoping the Spirit will wash away the wounds and bring life to the once joyful companion. Nothing materializes. The dead stay dead and the dog continues to bark empty wishes.
He whimpers and turns, tucking his tail in between his legs, ashamed as all normal dogs are when they realize they’ve done wrong to their masters. A dog with demons is normal. A simple man can put down a dog, but one with the Spirit—a newfound ethereal power given only by some heavenly being—is one that should be watched. Used wisely it can bring light to the shadows, but used in the ways tempted by demons will send the host into isolated damnation forever.
The bright moonlight glistened off the hand-hewn sandstone of the old Wayne County High School as Darrell Ramsey drove his black Monte Carlo, speckled now by the dust of the dry October winds blowing off the surrounding streets and antiquated baseball field. He eased his car into the space closest to the building that was constructed by WPA to give the workers money and the next generation hopes for a better life through education. He thrust his arm through the straps of a bulging book bag and anxiously looked at his watch when the light came on as he opened the door.

“Oh damn! It’s nine o two! I’m two minutes late and she’ll never let me live it down! Not after all the trouble she went to,” he whispered under his breath. “I hope the key I bought off Elmer opens the door.”

He raced to the far side of the building where he could see a bright light pouring out the windows of a first floor room. He breathed deeply from the running as he fumbled the key into the lock that yielded with a click, admitting him into the foyer where he ran up the small flight of stairs. He turned left at the top of the stairs, and entered a large room cluttered with educational posters and paraphernalia. A lone, silver-gray haired woman turned up her bespectacled, tanned face from grading papers to greet him.
“So, it’s you! I’d about given up and gone home. Maybe I should send you to the principal’s office for tardiness. I’m a busy woman you know,” she teased through a toothy grin made more obvious by an overbite under her dainty nose.

“Now, Helen, you know there is no principal here this time of night.”

“Excuse me, my name is Mrs. Bertram and I may even let you call me Honeybee, but not Helen. I don’t know you that well.”

“Don’t know me…! I had you for five classes here thirty years ago. Don’t you remember that?”

“Yes, yes, I remember: Algebra two, geometry, physics, trigonometry and calculus. So what? You still cannot take such liberties with me as I’m a lady,” she said as she reached out her hands. “Come here and let me see you. It’s been a long time.”

Darrell walked toward her, and plopped the book bag onto a large square wooden table near her desk. He bent low, feeling her cool kiss on his forehead, and spontaneously started to hug her.

“No hugging, now, Darrell. You know, I’m old and I break easily,” she clucked.

He laughed aloud and stood up, “Old? Honeybee, you’ll never get old. Decrepit maybe, but never old.”
“Very funny! Thirty years go by, and you still crack the same jokes. Didn’t I teach you anything?”

His mouth curled into a soft, wry smile. “More than you know, Mrs. Bertram, more than you know. You know, I’m a teacher now and I teach a lot like you taught me.”

“Don’t you have any original thoughts? You can’t teach like me because I’m so much cuter than you are. And smarter. Quit boring me with your life story and show me how much math you remember. Did you bring your books like I told you to?”

“Of course, you know I was always your slave.”

“Spare me the melodrama and turn to the section on solving quadratic equations by factoring. Impress me with your math ability instead of your conversation skills. Turn to page forty-five in the algebra two book. You know the big yellow one.”

“Har, de, har, har,” Darrell replied as he fished the book from the book bag. “Still the perpetual charmer, aren’t you?”

“But of course! It is in my blood, you know. Now do these twenty problems in about a minute or I’ll come back there and hurt you!”

“Now, Mrs. Bertram, you can’t talk to me like that these days or you’ll get sued. Wanna race?”
Helen sighed as she replied, “Yes, I know. That is why I quit teaching years ago. Nobody had any sense of humor. Everybody became so serious. Sure, I’ll race and I bet I’ll win, because I have the teacher’s edition with answers.”

“Yeah, yeah. For number two I get x is four or x is five. What did you get?”

“Why, the right answer, naturally. X is four or x is negative five. I can see why you missed it though: you had to work with big numbers like four.”

Darrell slapped his thigh and roared loudly, “See there, the trouble you got me in? I used that same line my first year at my new school and the parents had the principal call me and chew me out, because I had hurt their daughter’s feelings. Do you believe that?”

Helen raised her eyebrows. “These days, I’ll believe anything. I’ll give you an E for effort on that one. What’s next, geometry?”

Darrell pulled the worn book from the bag. “What do you want me to do, prove the Pythagorean Theorem again? I was the only student in your teaching career you ever made prove that thing by Euclid’s method and for what?”

“Well, it kept you out of my hair, so I could help other students who needed it. Didn’t kill you, did it? Made you what you are today.”

“Give me a break!”

“Right arm or left? You got a break. You got me for a teacher.”
“You can joke all you want, Honeybee. I know you loved me.”

“Who told you that?”

“Well, Mary Sue West, for one. And she was your best friend, so she should know.”

“Mary Sue West? Are you so naive you would believe a driver’s education teacher? And a Democrat at that! Tsk, tsk. Have you hit your head lately?”

“Now, come on. Everybody knew she was your best friend.”

“Maybe yes, maybe no, but you can’t hold that against her.”

“By the by, I have always wondered if you had anything to do with her daughter marrying the son of the top Republican in the state. ‘Fess up!”

“Why, l’il ole me? Of course not, but you have to admit that was funny.”

“Actually, ironic.”

“Now there you go using big words. Ten-dollar words out of a five cent head. Can you get that head to state the theorem about two tangents to a circle from a common exterior point?”

“No problem: Two tangents drawn to a circle from a common external point are congruent. Impressed?”
“Well, like I always say, even a blind pig finds an acorn once in a while.”

“You know what?”

“Of course, I do. He is a cousin of mine.”

“I went out to your old farm last week.”

“Without my permission? I think I’ll call the sheriff and have you arrested for trespassing. Sheriff! Sheriff!”

“You are just a barrel of laughs. Anyway, I found this.”

He stood up, reached into his right pocket, and pulled out a perfect flint arrowhead. “Here,” he said, sliding it across the desk toward her.

“Ooh, that’s a good one! Have I told you about how we used to see how far we could throw them when were kids?”

“Only about a million times, but tell me again.”

“Well, we used to throw them when were kids to see how far they would go.”

“Another knee slapper. Wanna know where I found it?”

“Probably in the lower tobacco patch near the peacock house. Did you see any of my peacocks?”
“No, but I heard them. You know, sorta sounds like a rusty nail being yanked out of an oak board.”

“ ‘You know’ is not a correct way to start a sentence. Now please use good grammar or you’ll sound like an ignorant hick.”

“Do you want this one for your collection?”

“Are you trying to bribe me? No, thank you very much, but I had to quit collecting them after Dennis and I moved to a smaller house. We had to give up so much: arrowheads, peacocks, and antiques. My knife collection.”

“How is Dennis? Still bothered by arthritis?”

“Oh, no, he’s all well. We do reminisce a lot about the farm out at Cooper. Do you still collect knives?”

“A few. Boker Tree brands, Case double x’s, Kissing Crane, Hen and Rooster.”

“What? No Russell Barlows? And you call that a knife collection?”

“I only had one Russell Barlow and I gave it to you when we were named Kentucky Star Student and Teacher. I always thought it would be sacrilegious to cheapen that moment of achievement for both of us.”
“I suppose, but let’s not get maudlin just yet. Hey, let me tell you something funny. Remember how I told you about the rooster that got drunk on pumpkin brandy from rotting pumpkins behind the barn? He was so drunk he couldn’t even roost.”

“Yes, you told us that in trig class. All three of us.”

“Did you know that Peggy is principal of Wayne County High now and Grady is president at a bank?”

“Yes, I see them from time to time, but I don’t get home much from Lexington. Me, I sort of wasted my life. I became a teacher.”

“Ain’t it the truth?”

“Hey, but your life was exciting. How many different colleges and universities did you attend?”

“Who knows? Eight, I think. Did I tell you that I was the first woman admitted to Case Western Reserve?”

“About how you and three other women earned the right to attend a summer session and had to stay in a men’s dorm?”

“Yes, and I how I saw the sign that said ‘Women Only Past This Point’ and I ran the other way because I thought it didn’t mean me?”
“Where you saw all kind of men in various states of dress and undress? Yes, I do remember that yarn.”

“Well, aren’t you the clever one? Are you clever at trigonometry? Solve this right triangle,“

“Oh, Honeybee, I can do this stuff in my sleep. Here.”

“Well, I can see your study methods have not changed any for thirty years. Do you still paint those wonderful bird pictures? I bought two of the owls, you know. And by the way, did you ever finish that saw-whet owl you promised me?”

“’You know’ is not the proper way to end a sentence. Well, I have it with me, but it is not finished. I stay pretty busy. Every time I start to work on it, something comes up. Sometimes I imagine that I can make it look like you, if I painted horn-rimmed glasses like yours on it.”

“Humph! I’ll thank you that these glasses make me look smart!”

“Don’t you mean visually challenged?”

“Well, I attended Harvard which is more that I can say for my present company. In fact, I took classes in the medical school.”

“Good thing you spoke up or they would have mistaken you for a cadaver!”
“Pure corn. Have you been watching “Hee Haw” again? I think I told you about having to study a rat skeleton.

“Yeah, and you dumped a rat on a chain in a vat of maggots to digest the flesh. Then you had to come home suddenly for an emergency only to get the rat skeleton in the mail in a few weeks. Yes, Honeybee, that’s a good one.”

“Did you ever understand continuity in Calculus? I recall that it drove you nuts your freshman year in college. Not that that was hard to do…”

“I got my degree in math, so I guess I got it. Say, did you know that the senior citizens home has been renamed in your honor?”

“Honor, schmonor. When I retired, I was so bored I had to do something. Then I figured a lot of other ‘old’ people would like to have some place to go. We turned out some beautiful quilts, you know.”

“I am going to hurt you if you don’t stop ‘you know’ stuff.”

“Do you still have all those awards you won at honors’ day? You did set a school record, didn’t you? You must have had superior teachers like me.”

“Yes, they were good teachers, but none of them were like you, thank God for small mercies.”

“Yuck, yuck, yuck. How do you get all that hair on such a little head?”
“I use glue. Nearly all of the teachers I had are gone now, retired or ... So why did you leave me? I thought you loved life too much.”

“Well, I have had my close calls. Remember when I was in the hospital and you came to visit from Michigan.”

“How can I ever forget that moment? There you sat upright in a hospital bed reading a book, yet the hollow look in your eyes tore my heart apart. I felt talking to you was like grabbing a fistful of sand. The harder I squeezed you to keep you here, the faster you ran away. So I just stopped squeezing and you ran away anyway.”

“Just call me quicksilver. But I never abandoned you, did I? Did you hear me calling you when you needed it?”

“And sometimes when I didn’t. Jesus Christ, now you’re getting maudlin. Let’s change the subject. I would suggest physics, but I guess we are beyond that. Look what I brought you. Remember the picture Kenny Crabtree took of us at that special luncheon when we won that honor? Here is my copy all framed and nicely matted.”

“I guess mine has disappeared over the years. Say, there is that Russell Barlow you gave me and the new slide rule I gave you. I guess they are both useless now, huh?”

“Helen, nothing you ever gave me will be useless.”
“Well, if it was, I’d never have given it to you. We were quite a team when we were younger. But as the poet says, nothing gold can stay. Here, grab hold of this frame. Okay, take the back off of it and hand me the photograph. That is all I need. Now watch this magic trick.”

“Magic trick, schmagic trick. Wait, how did you do that?”

“Well, if I told you I would have to kill you. Still want to know?”

“Why not? You always were just full of surprises.”

Epilogue

The phone call jarred Sheriff Kenny Crabtree out of bed a little before six o’clock. His wife mumbled her annoyance, as he turned over to answer the call.

“Hello, Sheriff Crabtree.”

He listened to the agitated voice of the janitor at the local middle school enough to recognize the need for immediate action before school started.

“There in five, Arnold. Keep everyone out until I get there. Everyone!”

Kenny hurriedly dressed himself and rushed to the door of his modest home. Still shoeless, he bolted into the cruiser and tore away to the middle school where the janitor
and ambulance workers paced around awaiting his arrival. He had managed to pull his sockless shoes on while driving so that he could run to the middle school building.

“Arnold, for God’s sake what’s going on?”

Arnold’s still-blanched face twisted in horror and pain as he spoke,

“It’s a mess, Kenny, it’s a mess. Blood everywhere. I think we’d better get the superintendent on the horn and have him cancel school today.”

“Let’s see what is going on. Get me a doctor or a coroner or some such damned thing. Get them lights on in the back!”

The men hurried around the building to enter through the still open door and face a scene of nightmarish horror. Darrell’s body slumped over a student desk so small that the hands of his long arms brushed the tiled floor. Piles of papers and books were scattered among large pools of dark blood that had drained from the long thin slits in his wrists, and had traced irregular rivulets among the shards of glass of the picture frame.

Gagging and heaving in disbelief and nausea, Kenny excused himself to go back outside to vomit. Pale and wiping his mouth with a handkerchief, he returned to the room still shaking with pain.

“What a damned mess! Who was this guy anyway? Why did he do this here? How did he get in here? Anybody got any answers?”
“No, sir, we didn’t touch anything until you got here.”

Arnold interrupted, “My helper, Elmer, told me he lost his key two days ago. I thought maybe this guy found it, but we can’t find it anywhere.”

Kenny walked around carefully, and took a few pictures for the coroner’s files. He rolled the body over and gasped “That’s Darrell Ramsey! We graduated together thirty-two years ago. I think his brother, Bobby, lives out in Slat. Somebody call him and get him here now.”

Arnold ran to his office and flipped through the thin phone book to find Bobby’s number. Kenny continued where he left off, “Darrell was the valedictorian in our class. Damned genius. Moved away to teach in Louisville… no, Lexington. I hadn’t seen him in years. He never came to any of our reunions. Wait a minute. What room is this?

Arnold replied, “Room two. Art room.”

Kenny shook his head, “No, it’s an art room now in the middle school. But when this was the high school, this was a math room. In fact, this was Helen Bertram’s room. Darrell and I had geometry together in this room. Man, they were a pair.”

He looked at the other men who stood speechless and ignorant of his reference, before continuing, “Helen Bertram was probably the best teacher ever to teach here. Had a really weird, but gentle, sense of humor. She got the funding for the senior citizen’s home.”
Great lady and a genius, too. Everybody knew that she and Darrell were closer than mother and son."

Kenny pulled up a chair, sighing as he sat down. "My senior year they were named State Student and Teacher of the year or something. It was a big deal around here. First and only time that had happened in this school. I was the photographer on the school newspaper and I took a picture of them together for the paper. Seems like they were handing each other something. You guys find anything?"

One of the ambulance drivers replied, "Just the books and papers there on the floor. There might be something in that book bag over there."

Kenny hoisted Darrell's book bag over a table in the corner of the room and dumped its remaining contents onto the table top. "My God, I ain't seen a slide rule in years, but it's the same books we used in school here. I guess he kept them all this time.

The driver asked, "Who? Mrs. Bertram?"

Kenny looked at him and sighed softly. "No, Darrell. Mrs. Bertram, died twenty something years ago. I think Darrell was in school in Michigan, but he didn't make it to the funeral. Seems like she died of cancer. Not pretty. Big funeral and visitation. Lot of people loved her. I was a first year policeman who had to escort the procession to the cemetery. Wasn't easy, knowing all the people she had helped over the years."
He wiped his eyes and nose. “So what did he use to slash his wrists? Piece of glass?”

“Haven’t found it yet. It’s hard to get around with all this bloody mess without disturbing the crime scene.”

Kenny looked around the room. Most of the desks stood in neat rows, but three near the bloody pools were overturned. He saw the broken, empty picture frame lying under a desk near Darrell’s body. He bent over to examine the frame’s pieces to examine for traces of blood. “Wonder what was in here? Why would he bring a picture…” his voice trailed off as he saw the slide rule lying on the table.

“It was a damned knife and slide rule they were holding! A Russell Barlow knife and a slide rule. That’s what was in the picture. Anybody find a picture?” he asked as he dropped to his knees to look under the desks. There it is!”

He retrieved the picture from under one of the desks. As he stood up, Arnold returned and said, “I told the brother what happened. He said he would be right up, but in a way he was glad it was over. Said that Ramsey was dying of colon cancer anyway, and was really suffering from the treatment. Said at least now he wasn’t in pain.”

Kenny knitted his brow as he asked, “But why do this here? Why not blow your brains out in the woods? Why not just eat pills at home or whatever? This makes no sense.”
He fell silent as he examined the picture to verify it was the picture he had taken in high school. “See, I told you guys,” he gloated as he held the picture up for all to see. Only then did he notice the small irregular point of light showing through the picture as if a shard of glass had jabbed out a hole as the frame fell. He flipped the picture over, pressing the jagged tears back together to form a complete picture that revealed a small white imperfection in the portion of the picture showing the gifts they were exchanging.

“Jesus Christ! What in the hell?” he cried as he pulled the photo closer to his face. “What in the damned hell is that?”

He studied the picture closely before exclaiming, “I can see the slide rule, but I know he gave her a goddamned Russell Barlow knife! I took the picture and I know.”

The ambulance driver asked, “Is it okay to load this guy up? I mean you got all the pictures you need?”

Kenny nodded, “Yeah, let’s get this mess cleaned up. Probably a good idea to call the superintendent and have him cancel school today. There’s no way we can get this mess cleaned up before school opens.”

He righted one of the desks and said, “Somebody get a broom and trash pan. We’re going to need some plastic trash bags.”
Arnold handed him a broom, and he began to carefully sweep the broken glass and scattered papers into a wide blood-soaked pile. “Probably just as easy to pick up this trash before we try to sweep,” he said.

He knelt down and began to pick up the gory trash. He used both hands to grab a large pile, but suddenly froze as he lifted it off the floor.

Arnold asked, “Something wrong, boss?”

The color drained out of Kenny’s face and he pointed at the floor. There, partially covered by the trash and debris, lay a Russell Barlow knife and an unfinished painting of a saw-whet owl.
Amelia turned down the old dirt road with ease, just as though she had never left. She slowed down at just the right moments to avoid clunking the tailpipe, navigating through a maze of puddle holes in the scattered gravel caused by decades of wear and rainfall. Truth be told, she could drive it with her eyes shut, even after all these years.

*It’s like riding a bike, she thought idly, you never forget.* Suddenly, she flashed back to her first time riding a bike. She had been so scared, terrified really, but she could feel her mother’s strong hand upon her back, guiding and supporting her as she tried to keep her balance. Eventually she could ride on her own, but she knew that her mother would always be there if she fell. Not anymore.

The letter had been short and to the point. ‘You’d best come home Adie, mom’s going quick.’ No one back home ever called her Amelia. They just called her Adie. Her father had never been one to mince words. *Some things never change,* she thought. She tried, in vain, to recall a time when he’d ever said more than two sentences together. Amelia’s mother was the exact opposite. She tended to speak her mind, even when it was something you really didn’t want to hear.

Round the last bend, Amelia could finally see the house; a huge monolith, smack in the middle of quaint nothingness. The building was constructed mainly of mottled gray stone with
raw logs for the roof and framework. She supposed her father had designed it to look rustic, but it was really quite hideous in her opinion. The stones weren’t uniform in size or shape, and the lumber still had some of the original bark left on it. Not much had changed over the years. The only difference, now, was that there seemed to be more patches of mold growing up the sides and on the roof than the last time she had seen it.

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Amelia would never forget the moment she last laid eyes on her childhood home. She had left without saying a word to anyone. She was nineteen, almost twenty, and headstrong. Was it so wrong for her to want a life of her own? She was so desperate to get out of this small hick town, and attend college. Why couldn’t her parents just accept that? No, they wanted her to settle down, get married, and have a family. Wash dishes and mend socks for the rest of her life. No, thank you. It was a Sunday morning, and everyone had been at church except her. She crammed as much as she could into the back of her little hatchback and sped down the dilapidated road as fast as she could, given its overall state of disrepair. She had kept one eye in the rearview mirror watching the house get smaller and smaller, until it disappeared entirely. Breathing a deep sigh of relief, she hadn’t really exhaled it fully until she had reached the county line.
Her parents’ home was on the very fringe of town, where the trees were still as thick as the bristles on a brush. It was autumn now and crisp leaves covered every inch of the ground. Without being able to see, she wondered if the front yard still had more tire tracks than grass. No lights were on in the house itself. Only the dim yellow light from the lamppost on the front porch illuminated the mist that hung heavy in the air. She pulled the car up alongside the porch and turned off the engine. She reminded herself to breath. It was only seven-thirty, but amongst the thick trees, dank fog, and the shadow of the house, you couldn’t tell the sun was out at all.

Amelia made sure her cell phone was in her purse and got out of the vehicle. She almost slipped right back into the driver’s seat when she caught her foot on a gnarled tree root looped up from the ground. Her father had built this house with his own two hands, but he never cleared out the trees. She never understood why he had left all these trees so close to the house. Wasn’t that a fire hazard? Regaining her composure, she started walking towards the door. Crisp leaves crunched beneath her feet as she carefully navigated her way to the front of the house. It seemed each step was harder than the last. The porch was level with the ground around it, and equally scattered with leaves. Walking up to the porch, she felt like she was pacing the dreaded thirteen stairs to her own execution. She heard a soft click, and then the front door swung open with a creak.
“Hi Dad.”

“Hey there.” Her father’s enormous frame filled the entryway as he stood there in the dim light.

“I got your letter.”

He simply shrugged, stepped back, and held the door open for her to enter. As she passed by she picked up his scent, and she knew where he had been. He smelled like a hospital, like antiseptic and floor degreaser.

“You been to see Mom today?” Amelia asked as she stepped into the foyer and took off her coat.

“Yep.”

“Well, how’s she holdin’ up?” Amelia was surprised at how quickly she fell back into a country manner of speaking.

“Doctor said she wouldn’t last a week, it’s been now almost a month.”

“She’s a strong woman.”

He just shrugged again and closed the door without a sound. Amelia could see he was wearing a dirty work tee underneath the wrinkled dress shirt he had put on to go visit her mother. He hadn’t bothered to change his soiled jeans or muddy boots either.

“You got your room, like always.” He said flatly as he shuffled down the darkened hallway towards the master bedroom. He shut the door silently behind him, and Amelia wondered how such a large man could move about with so much stealth.
After slowly making her way through the kitchen and down the stairs, Amelia stood in
the doorway of the room she grew up in so long ago. Flipping on the light, she was not at all
surprised that everything was just as it was the day she left. The bed was left unmade, her
dresser drawers were left flung open, and her poster of Led Zeppelin was still taped up to the
wall. The day had taken its toll, and she was exhausted. It wasn’t so much the long trip. It
was, after all, only about a two-hour drive. No, it was the flood of memories washing over her
without end that had worn her out. *I’ll bring in the bags tomorrow.* Without even turning off the
light, she collapsed into the soft mattress, and drifted off to sleep. Empty, yet full of hollow
dreams.

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The alarm on her cell phone wasn’t what really woke her up; Amelia had been
staring at the ceiling for a while before it had gone off. Where were the sounds from the
kitchen, the smell of bacon and the rich sweet aroma of biscuits in the oven? *Oh, that’s right, I’m
not fifteen anymore, and Mom’s not here. I’m thirty-two and Mom’s dying in the hospital.* She quickly
gathered her wits back together and headed upstairs. She grabbed her duffel bag from the
trunk of the car, and headed back inside to shower and change. When she came out again, her
father was sitting on the edge of the front porch tearing the plastic wrapper off a Little Debbie
oatmeal cream pie. He didn’t even look up.
“Eleven o’clock’s kinda late ain’t it? You ready?”

“Yeah, sure.”

“Okay then.” He laid down the pastry and started to get up. He froze suddenly, and looking out into the forest, he remained perfectly still, staring at the trees. He eyes took on a glazed appearance, like the people you might see sitting in the hallways of a nursing home. Not here in the present, but somewhere in the past.

“What you looking at Dad?”

“That big ol’ oak tree right there.”

“You mean the one that’s got all the bright red leaves?”

“Yeah.”

“It’s the only one with leaves still on it.”

“Yep, sure is.”

“Why’s that, do you think?”

“Don’t rightly know. I guess some trees just got a tighter grip than others. Like they’re waiting for something.” He squared his shoulders, as if the spell had been broken, and walked to towards the garage. “I suppose we’d better be off now.” He left the cream pie lying, uneaten, next to the wrapper.

Amelia followed him carefully, trying to avoid any more tree roots. She climbed into the old ’76 Chevy as her father started up the engine. It roared in her ears like some angry dinosaur, unwillingly brought back to life. She practically had to fight with the seatbelt. The
nylon was brittle from sun exposure and disuse. It wasn’t a very long piece into town, maybe twenty minutes or so, but the silence in the truck was overwhelming. It clung to her like damp clothing, yet she didn’t speak. She was thinking about the oak tree in its cloak of scarlet leaves. While the rest of the forest was nothing but bare branches, it was clinging on to its mantle as if it were afraid of being naked.

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Her mother’s room was on the third floor. This was their town’s version of hospice, where they kept the patients that were dying. The room was sterile, a varying décor of white on white on white. It took Amelia a moment to realize that her mother’s face was in there as well, pale and blending into the surroundings with a blandness that unnerved her. She was so much older than in her memories. Her face was worn out and brittle like the seatbelt. Amelia managed a weak smile.

“Hey Mom. How you feeling today? These doctors and nurses treating you good?” There was that old bad grammar again, she winced.

“I’d eat a lot better if they’d let me cook my own damned food. I can’t stand Jell-O and applesauce.” Amelia settled herself into the armchair next to the bed. Her father remained standing, a looming statue in the back corner.

“Mom, I need to talk to you. You know what the doctors said, right?”
“Sure. I’m dying. I’ve been dying for a while now. What is it you’re getting at girl?” Her mother tried painfully to sit more upright in bed, to no avail. Her tiny frame simply slumped back down again. Amelia attempted to adjust the pillows behind her back, only to have her mother balk at her.

“You know Evelyn’s never accepted help from anyone.” Her father grunted.

“I want to make sure you’re comfortable, that’s all Mom.” replied Amelia, turning back to her mother. “I know this may not be the moment to bring it up, but I want to make sure your affairs are in order. We need to make this as easy on Dad as we can. You know how he is about stuff like this.” There was a small huff from the corner of the room. “I know an excellent lawyer who specializes in this sort of thing. He works at my firm. I spoke to him before coming up here. He said he would start getting all the paperwork in order, and I can call him anytime for the finalizations.”

Her mother snorted. “I already handled all that. Got Jesse Hewlett to get all that stuff together for me. You remember him don’tcha? He’s a big shot attorney now, and he’s divorced. He even got the funeral arrangements set up for us. Bless his heart. I gave him your number by the way. Just in case something comes up. You two have a lot in common, being lawyers and all.”

“Mom, I really wish you hadn’t, but okay then. What else can I do?”

“If I think of something, I’ll let you know. Right now, just talk to me.” And her mother just smiled.
They had talked for what seemed to be only a few hours, but the clock on the wall spoke the truth about how much time had really passed. Amelia told her mother about a new job she had been offered in Oregon, and her mother relayed the story about how the horses got loose last spring and they had to go chasing them throughout the woods to get them in the pen again. Amelia could once again feel that strong loving hand on her back helping her keep balance, and she began to see her mother in a whole new light. The dignity with which this woman carried herself, even in her current situation astounded her. Her mother had lost so much weight and was so frail, yet she glowed with an inner strength. She seemed so calm and at peace with her surroundings, it was like they were chatting over a cup of tea. And for a time Amelia forgot they were in a hospital room, and envisioned their conversation taking place at home, in the kitchen. There were fresh black-eyed susans in a vase on the table and the smell of cinnamon rolls from the oven filled the air.

“Got to get back to the farm Evelyn. It’s nearly eight, and the horses will be getting hungry.” Her father said softly, as if he was hesitant to interrupt. Amelia hesitated for a second. She did not want to go, not now. She was being selfish, not wanting to be torn apart from her mother. In a childlike gesture, she stuck out her lower lip just a bit.

“Go on home Adie.” Her mother said with a pat to her hand. “We can talk more tomorrow.”

“Alright. We’ll be back here first thing. I love you.” Amelia kissed her mother gently on the cheek and straightened her blanket.
“Come on now Adie. You know she don’t like nobody fussing over her.” Her father said as he winked knowingly to his wife. Her mother nodded back, as silent understanding between the two that Amelia now sensed had been there all along. Age or maturity, perhaps both, had opened her eyes. She had never seen her parents in such a way before. It was a warm, comforting feeling.

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The ride back to the house was equally as quiet as before, but without the tension. Her father began humming softly, and Amelia realized that a deep sense of redemption that had taken over her. Once again she belonged here. She no longer cringed to call this place home.

The ground was soaked and muddy. A storm had passed through while they had been in town visiting her mother. She tried to recall, yes, there was a window in the hospital room. But she had been so involved in the conversation that she hadn’t even noticed the wind or the rain. She remembered only her mother’s face, bright and alive behind the thinning skin and frail exterior. Suddenly, her phone rang, jolting out of her contemplation.

“Is this Amelia Burgess?” A female voice asked.

“This is she.”

“Ma’am, I have some sad news regarding your mother. Evelyn passed away shortly after you left here. She had specified that you were to handle any such matters, and we need
your consent to process her last wishes. Could you come in some time tomorrow and sign some paperwork for our office?"

“Sure.” Deadpan. All five of her senses seemed to go numb at once.

“Thanks. I’m truly sorry for your loss, ma’am. Goodbye.”

Amelia hung up, saying nothing to her father. They were home. The big house appeared through the bare trees like something from a dream. Her father was still humming in the driver’s seat, blissfully unaware that his wife was now dead. It had indeed stormed heavily while they were in town. The great oak was now stripped bare. Its empty branches stretched toward heaven, silhouetted by the glow of the setting sun.
CHARLES NUNN

She Waited

She sat very still in her weathered and cracked wheel chair. The cheap blue plastic that covered the arms were as old looking as her own. Pieces of the vinyl were peeling; large cracks streaked through the material like the giant blue veins that were imbedded across her arms. She lifted her hands and studied her gnarled and useless fingers. They had betrayed her long ago. At one time she could stitch together the prettiest of quilts or sew a button on shirt in a split second. Now she couldn’t even unfold her fingers. They were locked in an arthritic curl. She couldn’t even manage to roll the giant wheel chair which had become her legs. She couldn’t go to the bathroom without the help of one of the aides. She glanced at the clock that sat beside her bed, only 10:00 in the morning. She still had a long time to wait. She watched her soaps when she could manage to stay awake, more often than not she fell asleep in her chair, her white head rolled to the side, her false teeth hanging part of the way from her mouth as she gently snored.

The young blond nurse aid woke her every day for lunch at 12:00. A plate of chopped, diced, and totally unrecognizable food stared at her from the faded maroon plate. She ate a few bites, moved the rest around on her plate so that it looked she had eaten more. Then she would wait. The young girl returned an hour later to retrieve the slop that they called nutritious and delicious food for the elderly. The same words were spoken every day, had been spoken every day for the last 6 months that she had been confined to this place.
“Good morning Georgie, here is your breakfast.”

“How are you Georgie, here is your lunch.”

“Are you ready for your supper?”

“Are you ready for bed?”

“We are having church in the dining room Georgie, would you like me to roll you down?”

She knew what they thought, simple words, simple questions, and simple statements for a simple mind. She wondered why no one wanted to just sit and chat a few minutes; they were always in such a hurry. She loved to visit and talk but for some reason she had been classified as less than a human since coming here. She was talked to like a very young child. She saw others citizens of the fine nursing home community walking up and down the halls, some with drool hanging from their mouths talking nonsense, others rolled down in their chairs, and still some actually carried on conversations as they walked by. She never called out to them. She was shy and felt out of place. She felt alone and afraid most of the time. She had a roommate that she liked but she was stone deaf. Communication was a series of nods, pointing, hand gestures, and occasional shouting to be heard. Still she was a nice lady who sat on the porch with her when the weather was nice outside and she could find someone to roll her outside.
Still she waited. It was 5:00 and supper was delivered. A lovely meal consisting of ground brown meat of some kind, carrots, pudding, and bread. They collected her slop an hour later, not even noticing that not one bite had been taken from the food. She began to feel excited as she waited, her eyes constantly darting toward the open door. She listed for footsteps down the hallway. It was almost time, just a while longer so she waited. She turned the TV off so she could hear. At last she heard what she had been waiting for, solid footsteps rapidly approaching her room. Her cheeks flushed as she identified not only one set of footsteps but two! She looked toward the door as they entered and blessed them with a wide smile. Her daughter, Bobbie and her granddaughter, Betty, right on time and ready to sit and visit a spell. Bobbie came every day, Betty less frequently but at least every week. Betty had to work out of the county so it was harder for her to visit, but she could count on Bobbie to visit every single day. For nearly two hours every day she would talk, listen, and laugh. They were her lifeline to the world, her only link to her previous life. They sat on the edge of the bed and in the only chair in the room and chatted about everyday things, how the garden was growing, what the grandkids were into, the weather, and times of old. It was her favorite time of the day and the two hours always passed by like the wind. She missed being at home. She missed her bedroom. She missed sitting down to supper with the family. She missed her life. Yet, she never complained or begged to go home. She couldn’t take care of herself and she knew that Bobbie couldn’t lift and tug at her to get her in bed or on the toilet. She wanted to ask to come home but she was afraid of the answer and she couldn’t bear the thought that she would be
denied. She told everyone that she could go home whenever she wanted but she chose to stay because she couldn’t take care of herself and Bobbie wasn’t able to take care of her. She hoped that was true. She hoped that she could come home if she wanted, that she had not been cast aside like a worn out piece of farm machinery. Still, she would not ask, better to think positive than to risk being hurt.

Hugs and kisses and words of love were exchanged as they readied to leave.

“I love you Nanny,” said Betty

“See you tomorrow Mommy,” said Bobbie as she waved from the door.

Now she waits. Day after day, night after night she waits. She begins to wonder if she only waits for them and begins to feel that she is waiting for something more. More often than not she prefers to think of the days when she was young. She naps more and more as each day passes. She feels so weak and tired. Even though she still waits for the visits that she receives every day she also waits for her life to end.

She remembers her husband and when they were young. She remembers her children and her grandchildren. She remembers her brothers and sisters who have already passed on. She remembers loving to ride horses and tending to her garden. Her family notices that she is no longer as animated as before. It is harder and harder to get a response from her. Soon her voice begins to crack when she speaks. She seems confused and sad. They want to gather her up in their arms and carry her away from this place. They want to take her home, to take her
back to the time when she was young and healthy. They cry when they leave the room. They
cry as they drive home. Georgie always manages to tell them that she loves them and that she
will see them tomorrow but she knows now that what she waits on is death.

Her bright brown eyes grow weak and dull. Her once strong voice is now just a
whisper, like the wind rattling the dry and brown leaves outside her window. Her snow white
hair lays flat against her head and her feet and hands are very cold, always so cold. She doesn’t
watch television anymore, she doesn’t read anymore. She sleeps, and dreams of better times,
times of the past.

She is planting her garden early in the spring. The warm sunshine warms the top of her
head as she gently pokes bean seeds into her garden. The gently breeze tousles her black hair as
she feeds the chickens. Her flower garden is all abloom with red, yellow, and purple irises and
tulips. She hears her husband Junior’s truck coming down the driveway behind her and turns
to wave and smile at him. She hears her two daughters playing on the porch as she walks
toward the house to make supper. She will have Junior kill a chicken so she can make chicken
and dumplings for supper. She is a wonderful cook and everyone loves her chicken and
dumplings. She smiles with contentment and satisfaction.

The nurse aid gently shakes her and calls her name.

“Georgie, Georgie, wake up, it’s time for lunch.”
She doesn’t want to wake up. She wants to stay at home with her family. She doesn’t want to wake up and eat the bland food and see the bland walls and the streaked window that leads to nowhere. She wants to go home. The nurse aid becomes more insistent and shakes her harder calling her name. Finally she gives up leaves the tray of food and walks away. She reports to the nurse on duty that Georgie doesn’t want to wake up and the nurse makes a call to Bobbie and the doctor.

Georgie closes her eyes and goes back to her happy world. She holds a newborn baby, her first born grandchild, Betty. How she loves that little baby. She rocks her, sings to her, and kisses the top of her little head. Soon other grandchildren follow but Betty is her first and her favorite. Like a movie playing in her mind she watches as Betty grows, and along comes her other grandchildren Charles and Amy. Then her precious grandbaby is a mother herself, she has a great grandchild, Ashlee. Just as she loved Betty, she loves Ashlee, a precious dark haired, dark eyed little angel.

Georgie hears voices as though they are far away, just whispers.

“Nanny wake up.”

“Mommy can you wake up?”

“Come on Nanny wake up for us.”
Its Ashlee’s voice, she is here now. She slowly opens her eyes and sees her family standing in front of her. Bobbie, Betty, and Ashlee, all grown up. She has only been dreaming. Everyone is older; she is older and so very tired. Her eyes are watering and her mouth is so dry that she can hardly speak. Betty hugs her and tells her that she loves her so much. She hugs her back and tries to tell her that she loves her too but only hoarse growl comes out but Betty understands and smiles at her. Ashlee holds her hand and asks if she is ok? She nods her head, although she thinks that she is not ok at all. Bobbie talks to her a mile a minute handing her a piece of fruit cake, Georgie’s favorite cake. She tries to get her to eat a piece of fruit cake but she just can’t eat it because she is so tired. They all talk to her telling her that it’s just a few weeks until Christmas and that they will be taking her home for Christmas dinner. They talk of food they will prepare for the dinner and tease her over being a good girl so Santa will bring her presents. Georgie smiles and tries to laugh. She loves these children so much; a small tear slides down her cheek as Betty begs her to try and eat some food. They are not ready to let her go, they love her. She doesn’t want to leave them but she knows what waits for her. They stay a very long time. They kiss her and tell her goodnight and that they will see her tomorrow. Before they are out the door she is back asleep, living in her past through her dreams.

She knows that before the sun rises again she will be home. She smiles as she nods off, eagerly awaiting her trip. Her frail body slumps to one side as she takes her last breath on this earth.
When did I get here? Where am I at? I thought I knew where I was. I thought I was playing around in my room, then I looked up and everything changed. I am in some sort of toy store; my feet are noisy against this hard tile floor though that might be because I am running to get out of this. As I’m reaching the end of the aisle I catch something in the corner of my eye. ME. A little pink princess kit was on the end of the shelf, its mirror reflected my image. The last time I had checked I was ten, this mirror shows a fifteen year old. Clouded memories are swirling in my head, giving me a small migraine on the left of my forehead. I was four years old playing in my room with Mickey and Minnie Mouse toys, then that image disappears and I see myself at ten years old moving into a new house, and I’m back to where I am now. When did I age? All that time that lapsed in-between those years feels like a blur, I don’t know where they went. All of this feels like a dream.

Now that I am out of that aisle I can see this is more than just a toy store. It’s a store that has everything. Maybe I’m in Wal-Mart and I hit my head? Guess I really should have watched out for falling prices. Heh. I glance back down the row I just ran out of and see a check out at the far end of the store. It feels and looks close and distant at the same time. A lone cashier is standing at the register. She looks like a statue or something. I can see her move her head to look down the aisles, she looks like she is patiently waiting for someone. Even from
here I can see she is wearing a black short sleeved shirt but I cannot seem to make out a face. My eyes just don’t seem to see her features. I may be able to see some if I were at a front view instead of a side but that would mean going up to the register and something tells me I do not want to do that. There are sliding doors further off behind her that are pitch-black, but tinted doors are supposed to look that dark, right? Right? I wouldn’t buy that. I don’t need glasses to see that there is something more to those gateways.

Should I be looking at her? Staring is rude but something’s gonna happen, I know it. Wait . . . someone is going up to her. An old man waddles up to her from the right. It looks like he is handing her . . . a piece of paper? A quick glance at it and her fingers start flying on her register. Words, I cannot hear them from here, a few words are said to him and then he starts walking to the exit. I watch him. What’s going on? The doors slide open. My legs are wobbly and my shaky chest isn’t helping any. Those doors were nowhere near as dark as the black that was behind them. As the old man walked through the doors to the other side he was enveloped by the darkness. It looked corporeal or like a thick dark fog. The old man is gone.

I still feel shaky but I can’t stay put. I’ll just avoid going to the far end . . . to that register . . . I need to look around.

There are so many aisles, one aisle leads to others, which lead to others, and then they lead to more. It’s a maze I know it is—a surreal labyrinth with store shelves for walls. The
lights are dim. It makes everything have a gray tint, except for the dark edges. I wish they were gray, feels like something is watching from in there.

There are so many people here, but they don’t really notice anything. Wonder if they are sleepwalking. The dim lighting makes their skin look gray too, like zombies . . . but they weren’t like that awhile ago, before I noticed where I was. They had looked normal and, well, they had life in them. Their eyes are lost and distant- focused on something else.

I’ve tried talking with a few but they don’t seem to hear or see me. Whenever I came close to yell in their ears I heard murmuring. It sounded slow and low, a sickly person’s voice. I strained my ears, walking with them with my face close to theirs; the things they were murmuring were conversations. I hear things like “What are you talking about,” and “You shouldn’t have made me angry, it’s your fault.” I can’t help but scoff and roll my eyes when I hear one say “I did not sleep with that woman.” But the one I am hearing the most is “Please.” I look around and see some talking with others but most are walking, and talking, by themselves. Am I the only one awake? Am I the only one dreaming?

Every now and then I feel myself being pulled at, that dream state that everyone is in, it keeps trying to take me back. Like when I’m about to fall asleep in bed. My body and mind zone out and drift.
Elevator music is playing in the background, different tunes playing all at once. Hearing takes a dive and nothing is heard but that music, but I hardly realize that I am listening to it. I break away with a start once I do.

Perhaps it is best if I start to look at the aisle labels, I will be able to figure out more that way.

Looks like I aimlessly wandered to the medicine aisle. There are many figures down it. A lot of them are wearing shades and black clothing. They look like they are going to or coming from a funeral. Their heads are turning every now and then to that counter and the dark doors. That must mean that they are awake too! Maybe they can help clear my head some. A small jog and I am in the center of the aisle.

They are staring at the shelves, just fixated; they look like pale faced fish. Hands are at their chests, clasped tight, maybe too tight because their shaking. I had to know—why were they this way and what was happening around here. I gently step towards one of them, a thin skinned looking woman draped in black and dark purple. She looks so frail. They all look like they would be easily startled, ready to jump out of their skins startled. I whisper “Excuse me.”

My God! Those eyes are petrifying, bulging with fear and glazed over like she is in a blind state. They are so unfocused, the way they are looking at me . . . I think that I am transparent to her.
“I’ve got to keep my eyes on everything. Colds could grow and be fatal. Dirt on your hands could be deadly.” She whispered like a madwoman, slow and low, just like everyone else I had encountered.

Her eyes shot back to the shelves and she screamed “I don’t want to die! I don’t want to be hurt or in pain! I’m scared of that!” and suddenly started grabbing different things on the shelves. This started everyone else, like a ripple effect, grabbing antidotes for whatever diseases their minds thought they had. All are wailing and giving such quick glances over to the register and doors that I thought that their necks would snap.

The next thing I knew, I was waking back up out of a haze. Fear was coursing through me as I looked around to see I was still in the medicine aisle. Arms filled with different medicines. I drop the medicine and bolt away. I faintly hear bottles hit the floor in a clatter as I run. Only when I had gotten fully out of the aisle did I look back.

Comprehension. They didn’t really see the dark gateways like I thought they did. All they saw was the image their fear had concocted, and I had been taken up by their fears and became one of them. But for how long?

Behind me, against the wall, was one of the freezer sections. I go up to it to look at my reflection in the glass. I cannot believe it. Awhile ago I was fifteen and now I’m twenty! I bang my hands on the door and scream “Why does this keep happening?”
I lay my head on the cool freezer door and breathe out. This is frustrating. Ah well, standing here will not do me any good. Nothing to do now but find someone else to talk to, I suppose. Maybe I’ll find a person that will either know what is going on or I’ll find someone I can wake up from their stupor. I hope.

I keep walking and glancing down the aisles. People of all races, colors, shapes, and sizes are along them. Picking up things from the shelves to open them and start using them. Some would look at the table of contents and others didn’t seem to care.

Ethereal salesmen were all along the rows, menacing smiles on their faces. Black hats hide most of their pale faces while long black coats cover most of their bodies. Gray smoke is billowing out from them and it smells like sulfur. The scent is thick. It’s making me gag and hack at the same time. I throw both hands over my mouth and step as far away from them as possible. How did I not see them before? Shifty eyes shoot back and forth to would-be customers, their black clothes blended them in with the dark edges that the light missed. They are holding up different articles, speaking of all the uses that they could be put to. I notice that they hold it so that their hands blocked the warnings. Why does no one demand to look at the warnings? Those guys are tricky devils, can’t they see that? Those air wave lullabies are not helping my head.

Hypnotic airwaves, zombifying aisles, sell-your-soul salesmen, this place is littered with traps!
Suddenly there is a slight, growing change in the tune. I hear, or more feel, a thumping noise further down. It is not a footstep thumping, it’s in the air, a vibrating thumping. I can follow the noise easily, the closer my eardrums are to bursting the closer I am to the source.

It doesn’t take long to reach the aisle the beat was coming from. The sign label above it reads “PARTY Supplies.” Multicolored lights from the top shelves flash down all over the row. Music blares from stereos that are at the midsection. People are dancing, talking to one another but their eyes still seem of glass, seeing but not seeing. Smoke emanates from in between the shelves. Plastic cups are strewn all over the floor, some crushed from where a careless person stepped on them.

I shout at the people to listen—that they were trapped in a daze. But no good, no one was here; they were all in their own worlds and unaware. Trepidation of falling back into the trance is keeping me from going in, but I cannot stay here. I have to try and stir them, even one!

I pull and shake one after another and still no change in their countenance. The deeper into the pathway the stronger the pull, I am torn between integrating into the revelry and removing myself as quickly as possible from it. I try hard to fight the pull, but the lights and the sounds fascinate my mind. I am just so enthralled.

My vision is a blur and my head is thrumming, the pounding from the stereos is filling my head and is slowly turning my brain to mush. I feel nauseated and want to throw up. Bile is already in the back of my throat. I close my eyes to block out the lights, and start to push my
way to the exit. My form is half bent over. I cannot raise myself up straight; my turning stomach will not let me. I am doing my best not to pass out.

Out of the aisle, I collapse to the ground. I just lay there breathing and collecting myself. I open my eyes and see myself in the floor, I must be around thirty now. How did . . . my god I have aged. I feel like I can literally see age in my eyes now. Twisting my body over to lie on my back I question the point of it all. Why fight the trance, why not just go along with everything, join the drones.

_Do I want that look in my eyes?_ — is all I can think. No, I do not want the look they have in their eyes- they were empty. I don’t envy that. I pity it. The happiness they had came from ignorant simplicity, settling at the base of the mountain and never seeing the view from the top. They were content with the stone wall in front of them.

Energy slowly starts to seep back in. I rise up and look at the register again; there are some people at it, words still inaudible. Each person is handing over the paper they held, and then walking through those doors. One person was from the “PARTY” aisle. When did he get over there?

Worrying over what is inevitable seems pointless now. If it is to come than it is to come, nothing I do is going to prevent it. I commence my walk again, but with a new state of mind. I pass over the aisles and look into all the glazed eyes, I can see some of them stir under my gaze.
Those elevator lullabies just will not quit, and neither will those salesmen. I shake my head. A few people are smart enough to know when a fast one is being pulled, but most buy the products and the end result is them on the floor, in tears. I hear them whisper “Why . . . how . . . please” through their hand covered faces. I just shake my head and whisper back that everything will be alright.

I have passed so many aisles, some twice. One I keep looking over is the Baby section. That’s when I see the most people attempt to wake up. I often thought of having a child but I don’t think that part of life was for me. The babies they held seemed to have life in their eyes. . . I wonder how long it will take for them to be put under the trance. I hope they manage all right.

I stay on the edges now. I’ve been around long enough to know not to get sucked into them, but I still call out to everyone that it holds. Whether or not they hear me I don’t know, but I do know now that I cannot wake them up—they have to do it themselves.

I have walked around here a long time. I realize that my feet seem to be thinking for themselves at the moment. I am feeling a pull . . . but it is not the one that I felt around the aisles. This is coming from somewhere else.

My steps . . . they are taking me to the register. I’ll admit I am feeling nervous but immensely curious and surprisingly calm. I take a glance at the obsidian doors and see my reflection in them. I’ve aged considerably. White and willowy hair around a face of wrinkles
stares back at me. Time is slowing, even my movements are slowed. But there isn’t any fear in me.

I watch as the person in front of me, a young man in his late twenties, gives his slip of paper to the cashier. They seem to be in their own sound proof air bubble. I watch their mouths move but no words come out. Off the young man walks—out the doors.

I look at my hand, somehow a piece of paper ended up there. A closer look revealed it to be some sort of receipt. It had many things totaled up on it: failures and mistakes, kind deeds, things I used in the aisle.

My gaze returns to the cashier. Her features are clearer. She’s a young woman, dark brown hair pulled into a bun, hazel eyes with a kind gleam in them. She softly asks how I was and if I had my receipt. I slowly hand it to her and she begins to type.

I looked back over the store. It was different from this point of view. It looked distant and the people looked like they had shrunk. There is still a grey tint but I can see more color in it. I hope that the others in there use their time a bit more wisely.

I have spent all my time here. Nothing left to do but check out.
Untitled  JEWELL BURTON
Untitled  JEWELL BURTON
Solitude  ROGER L. GUFFEY
In Motion  HAYLEY HAWKINS
Vroom Vroom   HAYLEY HAWKINS
Leap of Faith  CHARLOTTE MEDDAUGH
Pond Lentils  CHARLOTTE MEDDAUGH
Radiant Grace  CHARLOTTE MEDDAUGH
Screaming Faces    ALEXIS MEZA
Untitled  EVANGELINE MONROE
Untitled  EVANGELINE MONROE
Red Rose  KIMBERLY PARKER
Danger  KATY SMITH
Creek Water  TERESA TOPE
Gnarly Tree    TERESA TOPE
**Biographical Information/Notes from Contributors:**

**Don Boes** is a faculty member at BCTC. He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing. His poetry and reviews have appeared in approximately 75 magazines and journals. He has been awarded three Al Smith Fellowships from the Kentucky Arts Council. His first book, *The Eighth Continent*, was chosen by A. R. Ammons as the winner of the 1993 Morse Poetry Prize and published by Northeastern University Press. He also has published a chapbook, *Railroad Crossing*.

**Jewell Burton** is a student at BCTC and a Lexington native. She enjoys all mediums of art but photography is her favorite. She is a graduate of Bryan Station and her major is Art. She enjoys expressing herself through anything creative.

**Casey Cooley** is a student at BCTC. His passion is Filmmaking and he loves to write stories that engage readers on a personal level. Born in Eastern Kentucky, raised in Central Kentucky, Casey plans to attend Asbury University and graduate with a major in Media Communication with a focus in Film Studies.

**Robert Davis** is a BCTC student that enjoys natural science, world history, classical literature, and camping at Red River Gorge. He began his poetry writing in high school. In addition to writing poetry, he also enjoys writing songs.

**Savannah Ecklar** is an 18 year old student at BCTC. She also enjoys writing music, singing and playing guitar. She is very interested in the arts and plans to enter a field in which allows her to express herself artistically in some way. She is a graduate of Harrison County High School. She is now living in Lexington Kentucky.

**Bonnie Fisher** has been an adjunct English instructor at the BCTC Lawrenceburg Campus for the past three years. Prior to that, she was an adjunct English instructor for three years at Midway College. Originally from a small town in Georgia, she received a bachelor’s degree in English from the University of Georgia in Athens and a master’s degree in English from Eastern Kentucky University. Prior to teaching at the college level, she taught high school English for two years. Currently, she lives in Versailles with her husband and her two teenage children. In her spare time, she enjoys writing, gardening, going to the theatre with her husband, attending her children’s sports events, and volunteering monthly for an afternoon program that serves needy children in her community.
James B. Goode is a Professor of English at BCTC. 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 1960’s. 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.

Stacy Gordon is a student at BCTC. She enjoys writing poetry and fiction about a large variety of subjects. Originally from Georgia, she grew up in Central Kentucky. Ms. Gordon is a very passionate advocate for Human Rights.

Roger L. Guffey is an adjunct faculty member at BCTC. He has taught math at the college for 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.

Shane Harris is a full time adult education instructor at Danville/Boyle county Adult Education. He was born in Lincoln County and lived in Madison County for 12 years where he received his BA in English Education and his MA in Rhetoric and Composition from EKU. He is engaged to be married to Aleshia Hutt and has a four year old son, Caidan. Shane began seriously writing poetry when he was 19 and attributes his good fortune with the economy of language to Dr. Michael Bennett.

Hayley Hawkins is a sophomore at BCTC. She loves to create art, listen to music, and travel. She is originally from Mississippi and now lives in Lexington, KY.

Joseph Haydon is a freshman student at BCTC. As a graduate from Woodford County High School, his major at the time is Business management. He plans of transferring to the University of Kentucky to further his education. He lives a normal college student’s life and loves every minute of it.

Charlotte Meddaugh is an online student at BCTC. She enjoys creating art with authentic cancelled postage stamps and taking nature photographs. Charlotte is originally from Warren, Pennsylvania. She now lives in Hartford, near five of her eight grandchildren, and works at the Ohio County Public Library. She is a charter member of the Ohio County Artists Guild.
Alexis Meza is a student at BCTC. She is an Arts Administration major, and would like to transfer to the University of Kentucky and double major in Telecommunications. She is bilingual in Spanish and English, and she likes to write poetry in both languages. She is an activist for the DREAM Act and Immigration Reform, and does a lot of ARTivism in her community. She is very inspired by life and her art style reflects her personality. Alexis is a very positive, fun, loving, and passionate person.

Evangeline Monroe is a student at BCTC in Lawrenceburg. She was homeschooled all through grade school and enjoys taking pictures, playing sports, hanging out with family and friends, and playing with her dog, Orlando the Great.

Amber Mortensen is a student of history and languages at BCTC. She is the mother of four young children, and hopes someday to work in education. She currently lives in Lexington, Kentucky, but plans to move to Mexico after she has completed her degree. Her short story, “The Last Leaf to Fall,” is dedicated to the memory of Professor James B. Goode’s mother.

Charles Nunn is currently a student at BCTC. He is single and lives in Richmond, Kentucky with his dog Yoda. He works at the Bluegrass Army Depot. He enjoys writing, golfing, and spending time with his family. Charles also enjoys reading. One of his favorite authors is Silas House. However, he also enjoys reading just about anything written by Stephen King! Charles’s writing is based entirely on southern life and southern living.

Kimberly Parker will be graduating from BCTC in Spring 2011 with an Associate in Arts. She will then transfer to UK to receive her Masters of Fine Arts. She is originally from Campbellsville, Kentucky where she graduated from Taylor County High School. She has been doing art for over seven years.

Tabitha Shofner is a student at BCTC. She transferred from HCC in the spring of 2010. Tabitha was homeschooled her entire life until going to college, and hopes to have her associate’s degree by the end of Spring 2011. Her hometown is Sturgis but she currently lives in Georgetown, Kentucky.

Katy Smith is a student at BCTC. She enjoys taking pictures of the people and places she loves. A graduate of Boyd County High School, Katy is originally from Catlettsburg, Kentucky. She now lives in Lexington, Kentucky, and plans on achieving a Masters in History from the University of Kentucky.
Teresa Tope is an associate dean and Director of Fine Arts at BCTC. She was born and raised in Oak Hill, which sits at the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in southern Ohio. She is a published poet and enjoys taking photographs, as well as supporting the arts in many ways at BCTC and in the community.